



Mid-Coast UPDATE

Newsletter of the Mid-Coast Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists

FALL/WINTER 2020



Our mission: Education, Outreach, Service

COMING UP

■ Chapter and board meetings will be held virtually in 2021 until COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

■ **Full calendar** on our website: <https://midcoast-tmn.org/>

ONLINE

Get the latest chapter news and information on our website and social media outlets:



UPDATE

Mid-Coast Update is published on a periodic basis. Send feedback and ideas to communications@midcoast-tmn.org. **Print and save:** Save or share this newsletter! Use legal-sized paper to print.

Cunningham steps up as our new president

Mid-Coast Chapter enters the new year with a new slate of officers. At the Nov. 14 annual general membership meeting, Bob Cunningham of Rockport was elected chapter president.

Also elected were Vice President Bill Burge, Secretary Kris Kirkwood and Treasurer Charla Ingalls.

Other 2021 board members are: Membership Director Janet Cunningham, Project Director Ray Kirkwood, Communications Director Diane Roseberry, Advanced Training Director Linda Shirey, and Initial Training Directors Greg Simmons and Sally Scroggs.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic guidelines, the meeting was held virtually on Zoom.

Congratulations to all incoming and outgoing officers and board members!



Bob Cunningham was elected as the new president of the Mid-Coast Chapter, replacing Claire Barnhart.



The Mid-Coast Chapter's annual general membership meeting was held virtually on Nov. 14. This screenshot shows some of the members who attended.

Photography: Wildlife



**Wildlife:
2nd Place**

Linda Swickheimer,
Mid-Coast Chapter
"Garter Snake"

Swickheimer wins state award

Congratulations to Mid-Coast Chapter member Linda Swickheimer!

Linda, who lives in Victoria, was awarded second place in the wildlife category of the 2020 Texas Master Naturalist state photography contest. Her winning photo is a striking close-

up action photo of a garter snake.

The photography contest is a popular part of the Texas Master Naturalist annual state conference.

As a result of the uncertainty surrounding the ongoing COVID-19 pan-

demic, the state program decided to suspend the 2020 in-person event in Houston in favor of a fully virtual experience.

Join the contest next year! The 2021 state conference is been scheduled for Oct. 21-24 in Irving.

Invite your friends to join the fun

Do you know someone who loves nature and would love being a Master Naturalist? Someone who might want to learn with us and contribute to our projects? If so, we need them now!

Greg Simmons and Sally Scroggs, our 2021 Initial Training Directors, are determined to carry on with initial training, in spite of the difficulties of doing so in this pandemic time. Classroom sessions will be carried out virtually, and the field sessions we all know and love will happen as soon as possible.

If you know of anyone who is interested in joining us, now is the time to direct them to our online application at <https://midcoasttmn.wufoo.com/forms/mctmn-application-for-membership/>. The application fee is \$150, and we must receive that to reserve their spot in the class. The first session will start the first weekend in February. For your friends to get more information, direct them to <https://midcoasttmn.org/join-us/>

Tell your friends what you love about being a Texas Master Naturalist, and encourage them to apply soon!



**STOPPING PLASTIC LITTER
ALONG SHORELINES (S.P.L.A.S.H.)**



AMERICAN BIRD
CONSERVANCY



Plant Sale adjusts with the times



The 2020 HummerBird Festival in Rockport went virtual this fall due to the COVID-19 pandemic. So the Mid-Coast Chapter's annual Native Plant Sale did, too. Chapter members sort and tag plants at the Aransas County AgriLife Extension Office. Plants were purchased in advance, then customers picked up their orders curbside on Sept. 18-19.

State office plans training series

A new advanced training program is in the works.

In 2021, the Texas Master Naturalist Program is kicking off a new statewide event series – #TMNTuesdays!

On the second Tuesday of each month at the noon hour (12 p.m. Central Standard Time), the TMN State Office will offer an hour-long virtual advanced training event (sometimes including some fantastic new and returning guest speakers).

More information about each of the monthly events is pending and will be announced later by the state office.

But in the meantime, save these dates: January 12, February 9, March 9, April 13, May 11, June 8, July 13, August 10, September 14, November 9 and December 14.

Save the Dates for #TMNTuesdays

January 12	May 11	August 10
February 9	June 8	September 14
March 9	July 13	November 9
April 13		December 14





T E X A S



Master Naturalist™

Shop Amazon? You can help our chapter

Do you shop on Amazon?

Do you want to provide some financial support to the Mid-Coast Chapter?

If you answered yes, then we have a deal for you!

Outgoing Treasurer Janet Cunning-

ham has set up MCTMN as an authorized charity with the AmazonSmile program. AmazonSmile will make a donation to our chapter in the amount of 0.5% of all of your future Amazon purchases once you've designated MC-TMN as your charity of choice.

To get started, follow this link: <https://>

smile.amazon.com/gp/chpf/about. You can find our chapter by searching for Mid-Coast Chapter Texas Master Naturalist Inc when you set up the program.

And don't forget to tell you family and friends — anyone can designate our chapter for donations.

Chapter members on the go

Ongoing work at Goose Island's Big Tree



An ongoing chapter project at Goose Island State Park is removing Guinea-grass and brush at the Big Tree site. Vickie Wilson and Jane Moore show off one day's work. Contact Bill Burge if you are interested in joining.

Virtual presentation on rocks and fossils

Chapter member Greg Simmons (center) joins park ranger Josie Gunter and Randy Bissell of the South Texas TMN Chapter for a rock and fossil virtual presentation Oct. 31 from Lake Corpus Christi State Park.



Salt Lake rookery improvements



Chapter member and Keep Aransas County Beautiful board member Vickie Wilson organized a group of Master Naturalists and a few of her Salt Lake neighbors who worked Nov. 6 installing two rookery stands and cleaning up nesting islands.

SABP Bay Cleanup in Port O'Connor



Several chapter members participated in a coastal bay cleanup in the Port O'Connor area on Sept. 12. The cleanup was organized by the San Antonio Bay Partnership. The 73 volunteers collected 4.6 tons of trash from the waterways.

FAMI annual meeting presentation



Chapter member Rebecca Stapleton will present the program "A Year in the Life of the Refuge" at the Friends of Aransas and Matagorda Island's annual meeting on Jan. 16, 2021. Rebecca will use her artwork, notes and journal during the presentation. In addition to being a Master Naturalist, she is also a volunteer at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

'Doc & Martha' a hit at state meeting



Our chapter's "Doc & Martha" documentary was well received during the 2020 TMN state meeting. After the showing of the documentary at the virtual conference, there was a Q&A session with chapter members Brigid Berger and Ron Smudy as well as videographer Greg Pasztor.

Protecting water quality in Texas with better lawncare practices

By Chantal Cough-Schulze
Texas Water Resources Institute

Lawncare doesn't just affect lawns — it can also impact the water quality in local watersheds. The Healthy Lawns and Healthy Waters (HLHW) program is helping residents better understand that connection to improve water quality and save time and money.

Now in its fourth year, this science-based community education program has seen positive results. Participants are adopting many of the practices taught during workshops and reducing their use of nitrogen and phosphorus.

The HLHW program was started by the Department of Soil and Crop Sciences within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI) in 2017. Since its inception, the HLHW program has delivered science-based, community-responsive education programming to 355 Texans at 13 events in five different watersheds, said Diane Boellstorff, Ph.D., associate professor in Texas A&M University's Department of Soil and Crop Sciences and AgriLife Extension water resources specialist.

"We provide people with information to help them do the best that they can do in their own landscape," Boellstorff said. "The program facilitates environmental stewardship for the home lawn."

Lawns provide many services beyond aesthetics, said Becky Bowling, Ph.D., assistant professor in soil and crop sciences and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension specialist for urban water. Bowling also does work for TWRI and Water University.

Lawns control erosion, enhance groundwater recharge, dissipate heat and serve as biological filters. The choices that residents make in terms of their turf, soil and management practices affect how well lawns perform those services, she said, in turn affecting the watershed. Improper management can result in air and water pollution from fertilizers and pesticides, as well as wasted water. The best lawn management practices vary with the local environment and needs, so the HLHW program curriculum is customized to each area. This customization starts, Bowling said, with choosing the right plants for the right places.

"Texas is extremely large and extremely diverse. One grass species may not be appropriate for every environment," she said. "When you choose the right plant species for your area, you're going to minimize how many pesticides and fertilizers are required and how much water is required to maintain that plant."

Efficient lawn irrigation is also key, she said. Ensuring efficiency starts with doing annual irrigation system audits. "One of the things we really try to emphasize is staying engaged with your irrigation system throughout the season to ensure that it continues to work as efficiently as possible and doesn't waste water," she said.

Learning about rainwater harvesting can encourage residents to engage with their irrigation systems, Boellstorff said.

"Rainwater harvesting can be a gateway to better irrigation methods and better knowledge of how to manage water on your property, because it's intriguing to people," she said. "And then once they have a rain tank, they might look at drip irrigation with the water from the rain tank instead of using the municipal water."

Other best management practices are also vital, Bowling and Boellstorff said. Raising lawn mowing height encourages turfgrass rooting, while testing the soil can tell residents much about their lawns' nutrient, pH and water needs. Free soil sample analysis is offered as part of HLHW workshops. The HLHW program will be offering workshops throughout July, August and September. For more specific details on events and soil testing, see workshop event postings on the HLHW website.

The HLHW program's efforts are working, Bowling said. In six-month follow-up surveys, all HLHW participants said that they had applied at least some of what they learned at the training, and the majority were working on better watering techniques and fertilizing

based on soil testing. Many participants also said they passed on the knowledge they learned.

Implementing those best management practices has had tangible results. Based on survey responses, the HLHW program estimated that the annual nitrogen applied to participants' lawns was collectively reduced by approximately 19,000 to 114,000 pounds, depending on participants' previous use. The phosphorus applied was collectively reduced by approximately 6,000 to 38,000 pounds. Bowling said that means there's also much less nitrogen and phosphorus entering the watersheds, helping to improve and protect water quality. Using much less fertilizer — along with increasing water efficiency and using other best management practices — can save a lot of money, she said. The HLHW program estimated that participants have collectively saved approximately \$7,200 to \$45,000 per year by reducing fertilizer use alone.

"There are so many impaired segments of streams in Texas, and urban areas are growing, so the number of yards is increasing in Texas," Boellstorff said.

With more lawns comes more need for best lawn management practices, she said. The HLHW program, will continue teaching and empowering residents to better care for their lawns and watersheds. "People like their yards. With the HLHW program, people know where to go to get information, so they won't make an expensive mistake down the road and regret it and then have to retrack," she said. "It's nice to know who they can pick up the phone and call."



**TMN FACE MASKS AVAILABLE
IN THE AGRILIFE BOOKSTORE!**