Mid-Coast UPDATE

Newsletter of the Mid-Coast Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists

OCTOBER 2019

Our mission: Education, Outreach, Service

COMING UP

Chapter highlights for Fourth Quarter 2019:

- **Board meeting:** Saturday, Oct. 12 at 10 a.m. at Dow Recreation Center, State Hwy. 185, Seadrift.
- **Chapter meeting:** Saturday, Nov. 9 at 10 a.m. at the Texas Zoo in Victoria. Dr. Liz Smith of the International Crane Foundation will share the latest whooping crane update. Potluck lunch.
- **State meeting:** Texas Master Naturalist's 20th annual meeting is Oct. 18-20 in Rockwall.
- **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 four times a year. Send f\your feedback and ideas to newsletter@mc-tmn.org

Chapter booth at HummerBird Celebration in Rockport Sept. 20-22.

Our time to shine

Dozens of chapter members helped make the 2019 HummerBird Celebration a success. Volunteers organized and staged the Native Plant Sale, manned the chapter information booth and assisted partners with their exhibits.

"While we will present the final results of the sale at the next chapter meeting, the sale was financially successful," said chair Donna Bailey. "More importantly it helped to educate the public about the need for and benefit of our native plants. And, as a result of our activities, more native plants will be added back to the environment— a necessary thing for the wildlife we all love. And we got positive feedback from the public on how helpful we were."

Janet Cunningham, Donna Bailey.

Wilfred Korth, Phil Stapleton.

Native Plant Sale in front of the school at HummerBird Celebration.

How we spent our summer

Brush clearing, Goose Island SP

Master Naturalists (from left) Charla and Roger Ingalls and Nathalie and Fred Woolfrey worked with park staff in August to improve one of the bird viewing areas at Goose Island State Park. Knee-high brush was removed and feeders were put out.

Geology beach walk, Mustang Island SP

Mustang Island State Park hosted the inaugural Geology Beach Walk on July 6. The program was lead by Ranger Eric Ehrlich, Randy Bissell and Master Naturalist Greg Simmons, and was well attended by the Mid-Coast and South Texas Chapters. The next walk is Nov. 24 from 2-4 p.m. at Mustang Island, followed by an informal beach clean up.

Liveoak/redbay restoration project

As part of the Liveoak/Redbay restoration project spearheaded by Master Naturalist Ray Kirkwood, volunteers planted 200 liveoak acorns from the Big Tree and 80 redbay seeds in pots at the AgriLife Extension office in Rockport in August.

Plant Sale staging area, Rockport

Master Naturalist Carla Rinche (second from left) volunteered her backyard as a staging area for the plants for the HummerBird Celebration Native Plant Sale. This group of Master Naturalists gathered on Sept. 7 to clean and prep the staging area.

iNaturalist bioblitz, Powderhorn WMA

A group of Master Naturalists toured Powderhorn Wildlife Management Area near Port O'Connor on Aug. 10. Using their iNaturalist app, they documented any and all species during the bioblitz conducted before the chapter quarterly meeting. WMA Manager Dan Walker was the speaker at the meeting after leading the morning tour.

New driveway, Wings Rescue Center

A group of Master Naturalists worked on Aug. 7 to improve the driveway and parking area at Wings Rescue Center in Rockport. Bill Burge operated a tractor while others used rakes and shovels to level a load of stone.

PRINT AND SAVE

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Use legal-sized paper to print.

MEET OUR MEMBERS Q&A:

Debbie Griffith: 'I've been fortunate enough to participate in the actual dig'

► ***NAME:*** Debbie Griffith

► ***CITY:*** Rockport (retired and moved here from Houston 15 months ago)

► ***MC-TMN CLASS:*** 2019

► ***DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN THREE WORDS****:* Resourceful. Enthusiastic. Love experiences.

► ***FAVORITE NATURE SPOT IN OUR REGION, AND WHY?*** Gosh, I haven't been to that many yet having lived permanently in Rockport for only 15 months! So far, probably Copano Bay because it has multiple environments in one place: The water/bay and fishing and the amazement of the interaction between the wind, tides and the water. It has small islands and marsh grasslands where I like watching and pondering the birding lives and actions, and the wide and varied shorelines, much of which isn't really touched by humans and is an undisturbed environment with it's own history.

LEFT: Master Naturalist Debbie Griffith at the McNeill Ranch archaeological dig site near the Guadalupe River.
BELOW: A point uncovered at the site.

► ***FAVORITE OUTDOOR ACTIVITY?*** Exploring shorelines for shells, driftwood and signs of habitation.

► ***TO YOU, WHY ARE MASTER NATURALISTS IMPORTANT?*** After learning so much about our natural resources, environment and ecosystems, we are better equipped to appreciate, preserve and care for those resources and environments. Additionally, we have the opportunity to share the joys and enrichment that comes from interacting with nature and our environment, but also to educate about the importance of understanding and properly caring for our valuable natural resources.

► ***ONE THING ON YOUR NATURE BUCKET LIST THAT YOU HAVEN'T DONE YET****?* I'd like to observe live whelks, scallops, mussels and other marine life. I've only seen the discarded shells.

► ***DESCRIBE ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE MASTER NATURALIST PROJECTS, AND WHY?***
My discovery of unique and ancient shells along areas of Copano Bay led me to become actively involved with CoBALT, the Coastal Bend Archeological Logistics Team. The team works out of the Museum of the Coastal Bend and I became connected with leading avocational archaeologists that were involved in the excavation of the La Belle ship in Matagorda Bay as well as other major excavation sites around rivers and lakes in the Coastal Bend. Since 2003, the team has been working the McNeill Ranch site (41VT141) that is located near an abandoned channel, or oxbow, of the Guadalupe River northeast of Victoria. Excavations at the site show that it was occupied continuously from the Late Paleoindian period through the Late Prehistoric period, up to 9,000 years ago. After 16 years of excavation at various units on the property, Paleoindian points, blades, scrappers, bone, and other artifacts continue to be discovered. I've been fortunate enough to participate in the actual dig at the site and then the lab where we separate, analyze, record and store the findings. Every week I get to learn from these gentlemen by getting my hands dirty, direct observation, asking questions, and hearing decade's worth of exploration and discovery of our natural resources and Texas history.

LEFT: Master Naturalist Debbie Griffith at the CoBALT lab at Victoria College's Museum of the Coastal Bend.
ABOVE: The McNeill Ranch archaeological dig site.

KAREN BENSON

A sweet burble from the sky above

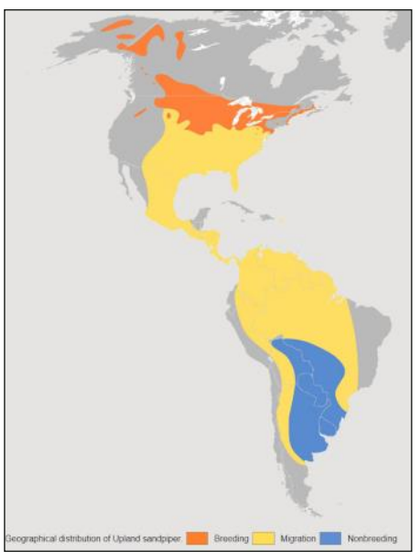
Mid-Coast Chapter Member Karen Benson writes a bi-weekly nature column for the Beeville Bee-Picayune newspaper. She shares one of her August columns.

In the early mornings, from high above, we have been hearing a pleasant little jumble of notes: *qui-di-di-du*. Looking up we see only blue sky.

It is cloudless and the day promises to be hot. Yet, something is up there and calling. *Qui-di-di-du*. The sound is now coming from a different part of the sky, a bit farther south. The thing, probably a bird, is moving, most likely migrating. What could be making this call?

Although only August, we know that many species of birds begin their southward migration at this time. In particular, the shorebirds are on their way to their winter homes. One, the Upland Sandpiper, leaves its nesting grounds in the tall grass prairies of central North America, and flies all the way to the pampas of Argentina!

This long migration — 7,000 miles — takes these sandpipers from their carefully selected nesting sites in the northern hemisphere to specific feeding grounds in the vast grasslands of the southern hemisphere. And although they make the journey fairly quickly, they do not go nonstop. Along the way, the birds stop to rest and refuel in suitable grassy fields and hay meadows. During the spring and fall migration windows, you can see Upland Sandpipers, ometimes in large numbers, foraging for insects and seeds on south Texas' grasslands and prairies.



The Upland Sandpiper covers a lot of ground each year as it migrates from its nesting grounds in North America to the pampas of Argentina and then back again in the spring. It is during these migrations that we hear the sweet burbles of the birds as they fly over south Texas.

The population of Upland Sandpipers was severely impacted by market and sport hunting in the late 1800s. This species was slow to rebound because a breeding pair only lays four eggs a year. The Upland Sandpiper is a bird of native grassy prairies but it doesn't always stay hidden in the tall grass. These distinctive sandpipers often stand on top of fence posts!

Still, these birds are more often heard than seen. This is because they travel singly or in small groups, high in the sky, and often call out to each other. That is that "*Qui-di-di-du*" we hear. However, even though we hear it in the morning, Upland Sandpipers are nocturnal migrants. I think we must be hearing them as they make plans to land and rest for the day.

Oberholser (1974) in his "The Bird Life of Texas" writes that the "mellow, fluttery whistles drift from the night sky during spring and fall migrations. To naturalists on both the North American Great Plains and the Argentine Pampas, these nocturnal notes have long signaled that wonderful migration is proceeding."

And to us stuck on the ground during the dog days of August, the Upland Sandpiper's nocturnal (and early morning) calls alert us to the changing of the seasons. If the Uplands are calling, can autumn be far behind?

The Upland Sandpiper is an unusual sandpiper. It is bigger than most sandpiper species; in fact, it is most closely related to the curlews, but lacks their long bills. Upland Sandpipers are almost never found on beaches, mud flats, or water edges. They are grassland birds. In the tall grass, Upland Sandpipers are often hidden, but they are inclined to stand on fence posts. On the top of a post, "a medium-sized, slender-necked sandpiper with big, plover-like brown eyes and a short (1-and-1/8 inch) black-tipped, yellowish bill" is most assuredly an Upland Sandpiper. The big eyes, rounded head, and short bill led ornithologists initially to classify this bird as a plover. In fact, it was known as the Upland Plover (*Bartramia longicauda*) until its common name was officially changed in 1973. It has retained the same scientific name since 1831 and is the only member of the genus *Bartramia*. The Upland Sandpiper, "rendering a great service to agriculture, devours a variety of injurious insects—grasshoppers, locusts, crickets, weevils, beetles and others." t also takes "moths, ants, flies, bugs, centipedes, millipedes, spiders, snails and earthworms" as well as a few weed seeds as it paces through grassy fields. You would think that such a beneficial bird would have been granted a great deal of respect by farmers, pioneers, and settlers of the Great Plains. Sadly, that was not so: "the Upland Sandpiper succumbed to the tolls of market and sport hunting in the late 1800s and early 1900s" according to the "Birds of North America" (2011) account for this species. "With no bag limits or closed seasons, birds were shipped to market by boxcar loads."

Fortunately, the Upland Sandpiper is making a comeback. Its overall population is increasing, and even though its favored breeding habitat, the native prairie, is declining due to agriculture and suburbia, this sandpiper is choosing to nest in the next best thing: grassy verges of airports. During migration it can be found in a variety of grassy habitats from sports fields and sod farms to hay fields and airport grounds. Our small county airport is one of my favorite spots to search for Upland Sandpipers on lay-over during their migration. However, when I checked there this week, my timing was off. The grass had recently been baled into hay. I guess the short stubble didn't retain many grasshoppers because no sandpipers were to be seen.

Even so, as fall migration begins, we know the Upland Sandpipers are heading to Argentina. As Aldo Leopold said in "A Sand County Almanac" (1949) "On cool August nights you can hear their whistled signals as they set wing for the pampas, to prove again the age-old unity of the Americas." Take heart! Upland Sandpipers are on the move! Cooler weather is on the way!

Four interns learn about the land

By KRIS KIRKWOOD
Mid-Coast Master Naturalist

Remember when you used to have to write about "What I Did I Last Summer" every fall when school started again?

Early in the summer we were contacted by a young woman whose official title is Morgen Ayers, CFM, Natural Resources Specialist, Texas Sea Grant, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. She had a project and three potential interns for us: undergraduates at TAMUCC Liliana Cantu, Carinne Johnston, and Yvonne Sheasby, majoring in wildlife science and biology.

Texas Sea Grant's mission is to improve the understanding, wise use, and stewardship of Texas coastal and marine resources, and what better way to do so than a hands-on project in which the students learn, work, and earn classroom credit toward degrees.

The students contracted with Sea Grant, their professors, Aransas Pathways, and MCTMN to work at a habitat restoration and enhancement project on two Aransas Pathways sites—Linda S. Castro Nature Sanctuary and Ivy Lane Birding Center. Throughout summer 2019 these three students worked alongside Texas Master Naturalists Ray Kirkwood, Kris Kirkwood, and Neli Spurrell and Texas Sea Grant Natural Resources Specialist, Morgen Ayers.

The students learned to identify native and invasive plants on both sites, and how to perform and document a vegetation survey transect that will be used as a baseline for comparison with future surveys in the same areas to determine whether and how the plant community is changing over time. They removed invasive grasses by hand at both sites and developed plans for restoring the now-bare areas in future. They restored and enhanced pollinator gardens at both sites and planted a new one at Ivy Lane.

Ready to haul removed invasive plants are (from left), Kris Kirkwood, Carinne Johnston, Liliana Cantu, Yvonne Sheasby, Morgen Ayers and Ray Kirkwood.

Kris Kirkwood teaches the interns about redbay.

During the internship, we all attended a Living Shores Workshop by the Texas General Land Office, and learned about the use of living shorelines as alternatives to traditional erosion prevention and shoreline stabilization methods. Since they were learning about the Live-Oak/Red-Bay coastal sandy-soil community of plants at the Aransas Pathways sites, we also made a visit to the Welder Wildlife Foundation to get a comparison with the upland, clay-soil, Tamaulipan Thornscrub community there.

In addition to their work at Castro and Ivy Lane, and as part of their internship, the students participated alongside Mid-Coast Master Naturalists removing invasive Guineagrass from the Big Tree Natural Area of Goose Island State Park. They also took part in a Live-Oak/Red-Bay Restoration project designed by Ray Kirkwood and funded by Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, planting red-bay seeds and acorns from The Big Tree. Plants from this project will be given to homeowners for restoration needed after Hurricane Harvey.

Students and Master Naturalists alike had a wonderful learning experience this summer. Further, this is a Texas Sea Grant program that may be available to members of our chapter in future summers.

The Sea Grant interns take a break while working at Castro Sanctuary in Rockport.