

# Mid-Coast UPDATE

Newsletter of the Mid-Coast Chapter, Texas Master Naturalist, Inc.

**MARCH 2021**



**Our mission: Education,  
Outreach, Service**

## UPCOMING

Mid-Coast Chapter Board Meeting  
April 10  
*All members are welcome to attend.*

Mid-Coast Chapter Meeting  
May 8  
*Details to be announced*

## IN THIS ISSUE

Annual Plant Sale Update  
Page 2

## Mid-Coast Chapter President

Bob Cunningham's Thoughts



Page 3

Black Mangrove and  
Initial Training News  
Page 4

Cold Stunned Turtles  
Page 5

Annual Crab Trap Removal  
Page 6

## SPRING THAW ISSUE

### AFTER THE BIG FREEZE

By Ginger Easton Smith  
County Extension Agent  
Agriculture and Natural Resources

Whoa Nelly! Put that chain saw away! It is too soon to cut any large trees or palms that you think died in the big freeze. For many plants, patience is needed for at least a couple months to see if they will survive.

**WOODIES** - It is fine to trim back woody shrubs –there is no reason to rush as it does not help the plant, but it also won't hurt it. The disadvantages are that you could cut back branches that are still alive, or you might not cut enough, and must prune again in a few weeks. If you wait until the new buds develop into leaves in a couple weeks, it will become obvious where to make pruning cuts to remove any dead sections. When you do make cuts, keep a few pruning "rules" in mind for branches larger than ½" diameter: do not make flush cuts or leave long stubs, instead, make the cut just beyond the branch collar (the slight swelling where the branch meets the trunk). Pay attention to the crotch angle (between the trunk and the branch); an angle of 60-90 degrees will result in the strongest connections.

**MUSH** - Plants that are not woody and have tissue that has turned mushy are a different story – remove the mush to prevent pathogens that might have entered through it, from moving toward the center of the plant. Cut back to where the stem is firm. Be sure to dip your pruners in rubbing alcohol for 30 seconds between cuts to keep from spreading potential pathogens to other plants or plant parts.

If you had already planned to prune shrubs and trees to control their size, or to shape them, there is no need to wait. Turk's cap, cenizo, esperanza, beautyberry, ornamental grasses, and many



**Native Sabal palm wasn't bothered by the extended frigid temperatures.**

other plants can be pruned lightly or heavily. Do not prune redbud or any other early spring-bloomers, or you will remove the potential flower buds.

**PALMS** - Do not prune any fronds that are even partially green (because they can photosynthesize, and palms need all the photosynthetic capacity they can get), or fronds that are "standing up" (since they can protect the crown from strong winds).

If the spear leaf can be pulled out easily there is still a chance (be it wee) the palm will survive. The damaged tissue will be susceptible to fungal and bacterial infection, so drench the center (from the top) with copper fungicide to reduce the chance of this. If the bark is cracking or weeping, also spray it thoroughly with the same product. Read the label to find out when to make a second application. The label "is the law" and must be followed. Do not use copper sulfate on palms.

**LEAVES** - "Leave the leaves" and other dry plant material on the ground. They add nutrients and organic matter as they break down, feeding and improving the soil micro-organisms, and feeding the plants as well. Move them to



another area if you want, but don't get rid of them.  
WATERING – If they don't have leaves, plants cannot use much water right now because they are not transpiring water from their leaves. Poke your “digital moisture meter” (your finger!) at least 1” in the ground – if the soil is moist, don't water. Check again in a couple days and water thoroughly when it is dry 1” down. Then do not water again for a couple weeks, again first testing the soil with your moisture meter. Take a look around and see what plants (besides stinging nettle and burr clover) are still green – most of them will be natives. Keep them in mind when purchasing new plants for your yard and garden.

*This Washingtonian spp., was significantly damaged by the freeze. This one should make it but many won't.*



TEXAS A&M  
AGRI LIFE  
EXTENSION



## ANNUAL PLANT SALE

NOTE FROM JANET CUNNINGHAM

Janet is our current Membership Director and Plant Sale Co-Director. Master Naturalist since 2018 and Aransas/San Patricio County Master Gardener since 2015. Reach her at [janethcunningham@gmail.com](mailto:janethcunningham@gmail.com) or by phone at 713-806-1784.

With the February freeze behind us, we are finding that our gardens took a big hit. It is very disheartening, but give your plants, especially the natives, some time to recover and put on some new growth. However, many won't make it.

Since our Chapter fall plant sale is our ONLY fundraiser, it makes our propagation efforts even MORE important now. Propagation can be done easily by seeds or cuttings. You don't need special tools, just some pots, loose dirt, large plastic or zip-lock bags, and rooting compound. Our Chapter has 1-gallon pots available for you to use. For those of you with limited space, the Chapter has four large plant tables members can use, located at the Kirkwood residence. PLUS - You can earn volunteer hours for propagating plants!!!

Listed below are just few useful links to help you get started.

Propagation Intro <https://dcmga.com/north-texas-gardening/community-gardening/plant-propagation-introduction/>

Propagate flowering plants <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/ornamental/a-reference-guide-to-plant-care-handling-and-merchandising/propagating-foliage-flowering-plants/>

Propagation guide <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/prop.html>

Native plant propagation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qakap9-SHAY>

Lady Bird Wildflower Center – How-To tips <https://www.wildflower.org/learn/how-to>

Wild Seed Project, grow natives from seed <https://wildseedproject.net/how-to-grow-natives-from-seed/>



Stay Informed by Joining our Facebook Group  
Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalists

Check the Chapter Calendar Frequently: [CALENDAR](#)



**Welcome to 2021** and the first edition of the year for our Chapter newsletter. After adjusting to Covid-19 challenges in 2020 we looked forward to renewed energy in 2021... that is, until so many of us experienced real-life energy shortages during the dark and cold of Winter Storm Uri! We hope everyone is now returning to the “new normal” before the freeze. Still, there’s no truth to the rumor that “2021” should be read as “2020 Won” as we endured yet another new test of fortitude. Instead, our Mid-Coast Chapter members continue to model perseverance, resiliency, engagement—and good humor—in pursuing our missions as master naturalists.

### **Winter Storm Uri**

Much of this newsletter edition is devoted to the unprecedented winter freeze. We applaud Mid-Coast members who continue to act as good stewards of our natural resources throughout trying circumstances: out on the bays helping to rescue cold-stunned turtles; working with groups like Wings Rescue, or maintaining yard feeders to support local birds and wildlife; removing crab traps despite weather delay; and posting observations of wildlife deaths on iNaturalist to assist TPWD’s calculation of freeze effects.

The freeze-burnt landscape is dismaying while awaiting spring rebound. Advice from AgriLife Extension in Rockport recommends patience before heavily pruning or giving up. For now, cut back only parts that have turned soft & mushy or are unequivocally dead. And avoid root rot from overwatering before enough green leaves return for transpiration. Will northward expansion of black mangrove be deterred by these severe conditions? Probably a good bet that spreading invasives like guinea grass or Brazilian pepper haven’t slowed much, so stay vigilant with eradication efforts!

### **Chapter News**

The Chapter meeting on February 13<sup>th</sup>—just ahead of the Big Freeze—was a great success. About 45 members attended via Zoom to hear a presentation by Rosario Martinez of Coastal Bend Bay & Estuaries Program describing projects on rookery islands in our area, saving shoreline at Dagger Point at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), and environmental work on Matagorda Island.

Thanks to VP Bill Burge for arranging and running this Zoom meeting. The next Chapter meeting on May 8<sup>th</sup> also will be virtual, and we’ll wait and see about the August 14<sup>th</sup> meeting format.

This was my first time reporting to the Chapter as newly incoming President, joined by new Treasurer, Charla Ingalls; new Membership director, Janet Cunningham; new Newsletter editor and New Class Representative, Debbie Luce Minns; and new Initial Training directors, Greg Simmons and Sally Scroggs. Kris Kirkwood accepted the position of Secretary (among her other responsibilities) but has issued a running invitation to any member who’d like to take that role. Ray Kirkwood remains Projects director; Linda Shirey continues as Advanced Training director; and Claire Barnhart is taking up the Past-President mantle. We also welcome Diane Roseberry as new Communications director, who was unable to attend the Chapter meeting but is keeping our Facebook site humming.

For any who missed the meeting, check out the [Minutes](#) posted to the Chapter website.

Of particular note, the Chapter now registers over 120 members—a record high—of whom some 114 are active or in training. We’re in good shape financially, with the 2021 budget approved. Virtual and field VS and AT opportunities abound and are being posted almost daily to the Chapter website and circulated via email. Remarkably, almost 60% of active members have reported hours in 2021, consisting of over 660 volunteer hours and over 65 advanced training hours! Initial Training is underway with 17 trainees in the Class of 2021, offering 70 hours of virtual and field session instruction aiming towards graduation in June.

Kudos to members: Robyn Savage, Brigid Berger, Bill Burge and D’Ann Williams who lead the pack by re-certifying for 2021 already, and to four of our fifteen newly minted Class of 2020 members who’ve earned initial certification: D’Ann Williams, Janie Von Dohlen, Linda Swickheimer, and Debbie Minns.

### **Covid-19 and TMN State News**

TMN’s issued recent Covid-19 guidance on January 21, 2021. Click here to view the [COVID-GUIDELINES](#) on the State website. In a nutshell: virtual options are preferred; masks, social-distancing, and sanitary precautions are always required; indoor activities allowed with 100 sq ft for each participant; outdoor activities with 6 ft distancing and limited to lesser of 10 participants or the maximum allowed by a participating partner or local government jurisdiction. These rules govern not only formal Chapter activities like meetings and training classes, but also all volunteer activities and training with third parties. Please familiarize yourselves with the rules, exercise good judgment, act responsibly, and don’t hesitate to opt out if you feel personally uncomfortable about your own safety.

TMN allows earning all 8 hours of AT virtually for 2021, but only for presentations with live Q&A opportunity with the presenter. An exception is TMN’s own monthly “TMN Tuesday” presentations which can be watched live or pre-recorded on TMN’s website.

Sure looking forward to eventual return of a “real” normal when we can enjoy working and meeting together again face-to-face. Maybe later this year? See you then!

**Bob Cunningham**

**Mid-Coast Chapter President**



# What about the Black Mangroves?

By **Laura A. Bonneau**

Visitor Services Manager

Aransas National Wildlife Refuge

Find us online: [Aransas NWR](#) | [Facebook](#)

I spoke to our Supervisory Wildlife Biologist, Andy Stetter, about black mangrove. It definitely was adversely affected by our recent freeze, but it remains to be seen what the long-term effects will be. Andy said that the mangrove seeds that were exposed were obviously no longer viable, but that the ones that were protected (under debris, crab traps, etc.) were still green and viable.

In terms of whooping crane habitat, the expansion of black mangrove means a decrease in available foraging habitat. Whooping cranes spend most of their foraging time walking around the marsh, looking for blue crabs and other prey. Black mangrove chokes out typical salt marsh species, including Carolina wolfberry, and also forms thickets so dense that whooping cranes choose more open areas rather than risk predation. (That's partly why they forage in open marsh - they can see and hear predators coming).

On the plus side, black mangrove provides a nursery for a wide diversity of species, including blue crabs, as well as important ecosystem benefits like erosion control and reduction of wave energy. It remains to be seen in the long term how black mangrove will continue to affect the Texas coast.



Here's an interesting presentation you might want to view: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEdqm0VZBds>



## 2021 Coastal Lecture Series: "Florida's Mangroves Move North in the Absence of Winter Freezes"

See how Florida's emblematic mangrove forests are shifting north in response to a warming climate. This northward expansion may help to protect coastal communities against sea level rise and severe weather events like hurricanes, while simultaneously removing the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide from our atmosphere – all critical factors as we ...  
[www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEdqm0VZBds)

## 2021 Class Update

By **Sally Scroggs and Gregory Simmons**

The freeze did have a major impact on the training schedule as we had to postpone our Mid-Coast Ecology field session at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, which was scheduled for February 18 and 20, the weekend after the storm. The class has not yet had an opportunity to meet in person or receive their books and other materials. We have rescheduled for March 11 (virtual) and 13th at ANWR. Hopefully the foliage will start to recover at the refuge, since native plant identification using a dichotomous plant key is part of the training. We are looking forward to finally getting together with everyone.



## Meet the Class of 2021

A few members will be introduced in each newsletter this year.



**Susie A. Anaya Starnes** has taught for 23 years, and currently teaches Spanish, K3-4th, at Trinity Episcopal School. She has a heart for all animals and their research. Fun fact: Lives in Texas and Montana!



**Tracey Ramsey Bennett** is retired President of San Antonio Public Library Foundation. Her UT-Austin education is in Radio, TV and Film. She has strong ties to our nearby inland and coastal areas, Goliad, and Port Aransas.



**Monica Clark** is a retired school teacher and business owner. She is currently involved with Rockport Little Theatre and has snow-skied all over the world!



# Turtles in the News

By D'Ann Williams

Keep Aransas County Beautiful, Inc. – President  
Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalist Class of 2020

Dr. Donna Shaver leads the Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery at Padre Island National Seashore. It is the only division of its kind in the entire National Park system. With over 40 years of experience, her program focuses on the five sea turtle species: Kemp's Ridley, Green, Loggerhead, Hawksbill, and Leatherback. All are federally listed as threatened or endangered.

The Cold-Stunned Stranding (CSS) program began in 1980 with the last large cold-stunned stranding in the winter of 2017-2018 with 3,702 sea turtles recovered. This pales in comparison to what happened this February. Preliminary numbers show that over 11,000 were found along the Texas Coast with the majority in Aransas County to the Upper and Lower Laguna Madre. The totals on how many were able to be saved and released approximately 30 miles offshore will be forthcoming.

D'Ann and her husband Mark have been federally trained for CSS for 3 years. Due to weather conditions, local, state and federal authorities could not allow their staff on the waters to do searches.



After 3 years, we've learned to wear at the very least 5 layers, wear ski goggles and use motion cancelling binoculars for shore scans.

Rather, they were assigned to walk shorelines. For 2 days, D'Ann and Mark literally had the only boat out

on the waters of Aransas and Redfish Bays finding turtles along shorelines and transporting them to Biologists and Veterinarians at Amos Rehabilitation Keep's (ARK) boat ramp in Port Aransas, with thanks to Conn Brown Harbor for opening up to get them fuel.

At one point we had almost 40 federally trained persons in our area. Admittedly, we need to get better at spreading the work around when calls come in during the year. As some have felt they never got a chance to volunteer, that is something that will be addressed for 2021-2022 year.

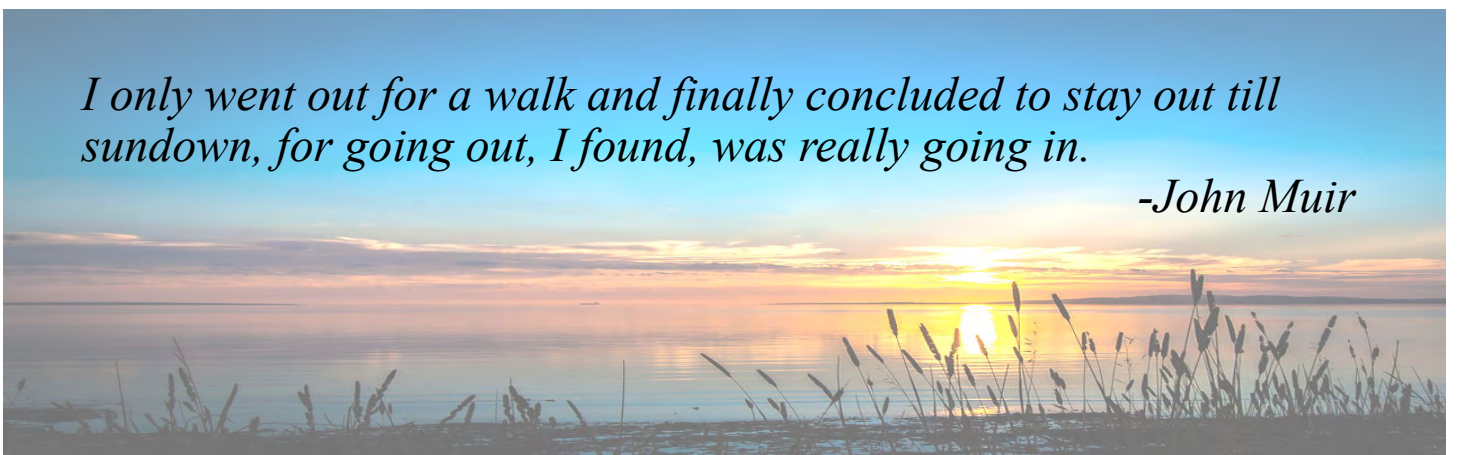


Dr. Shaver teamed Brian Flowers (pictured) with them after he emailed saying he'd like to help. Brian is a Regional Supervisor the Missouri Department of Conservation and was vacationing in Rockport. The turtle seen here was picked up when we were taking in our last load of the day and it was literally at ARK's boat ramp entrance which is located at the Port A Jetties.

**Cold-Stunned Stranding training is in the Fall and it counts as AT for Master Naturalists.**

*I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.*

*-John Muir*



# ABANDONED CRAB TRAP REMOVAL PROGRAM

## February 2021 Results for Texas Mid-Coast Bay Systems

By Allan Berger

Chairman, San Antonio Bay Partnership

Every February, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department closes the bays to commercial and recreational crabbing for a 10-day period. This temporary closure enables a coordinated effort by agencies and organizations to remove derelict crab traps which continue to entrap and kill crabs, fish, and turtles.

This year, 1203 traps were removed from the three coastal bay systems on the Texas mid-coast (Lavaca/Matagorda, San Antonio, and Aransas Bays). “It’s especially important to remove these old traps from the bays. Not only are they a source of ghost-fishing, but they are also navigation hazards and unsightly litter,” said co-organizer Katie Swanson, Mission-Aransas Reserve Stewardship Coordinator at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute.

Removal of derelict crab traps was a massive effort this year involving 60 boat days and 148 volunteer days. The effort was led by San Antonio Bay Partnership, Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve, the Lavaca Bay Foundation, and the Matagorda Bay Foundation who organized many groups, including U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Coastal Fisheries, local chapters of the Coastal Conservation Association, the Guadalupe Blanco River Trust, International Crane Foundation, Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalists, Texas Sea Grant, Lavaca-Navidad River Authority, and individual citizen volunteers.



Brigid Berger, Diane Pletcher and Barb Threatt;  
“The Happy Hookers” with a nice haul.

This is the second year that technology was used to collect data on each removed trap including: location, owner, and content. SABP Chairman Allan Berger stated, “The data reveals that many of the derelict traps are on the shoreline, likely the result of several storms this summer. However, a significant number appear to be in place and not picked up by commercial crabbers. It is anticipated that an analysis of the data can reveal root causes and result in fewer lost traps in the future.”

“The effort was a great success thanks to the volunteers and organization that participated despite the disruptions of the winter storm. The weather reduced boats and volunteers. Further, TPWD recommended that the start of the effort be delayed three days to allow commercial crabber additional time to retrieve their traps since the winter storm had interrupted their work.”

Berger continues, “The loss of three days during the closure challenged the cleanup team to effectively search the bays in the remaining seven days. However, it was far better for the crabbers to retrieve their traps.”

The tally is significantly lower than last year’s count of 1632. While a detailed analysis of the data remains to be completed, Berger anticipates that the cause is due both to fewer boats and volunteers and the crabbers having done a better job of retrieving their traps.

This year’s derelict crab clean-up effort was supported with funds from a NOAA Marine Debris Program Community-based Marine Debris Removal grant obtained by the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, supplemented by local sponsors Guadalupe Blanco River Trust, Guadalupe Blanco River Authority, and the San Antonio River. In addition, in-kind support was provided by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Sea Grant, Bay Flats Lodge, Lavaca-Navidad River Authority, and the captains who provided their private boats.

Berger says that “While the cleanup is a lot of work, it is essential for keeping our bays clean and productive—and it’s fun.” If you want to be included in the early planning for next year, contact Allan Berger at [sanantoniobaypartnership@gmail.com](mailto:sanantoniobaypartnership@gmail.com).