

Mid-Coast UPDATE

Newsletter of the Mid-Coast Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists

SUMMER 2019



Our mission: Education, Outreach, Service

COMING UP

Chapter highlights for Third Quarter 2019:

■ **Board meeting:** Saturday, July 13 at 10 a.m. at Dow Recreation Center, State Hwy 185, Seadrift.

■ **Chapter meeting:** Saturday, Aug. 10 at 10 a.m. Location TBA

■ **Register:** Texas Master Naturalist's 20th annual meeting is in October in Rockwall. Details on Page 3.

■ **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 your feedback and ideas to newsletter@mc-tmn.org

15 get their wings as new chapter members



Mid-Coast Chapter class of 2019 (from left): Carla Rinche, Fred Woolfrey, Nathalie Woolfrey, Mike Hejducek, Rachael Diaz, Dennis Durkee, Janet Cunningham, Gregory Simmons, Sally Scroggs, James Coquat, Don Roach, Regina Payton, Debbie Griffith and training director Bob Cunningham. Absent are Charla Ingalls and Roger Ingalls. (Photo by Norm Hirsch)

By DENNIS DURKEE Mid-Coast Chapter

Mid-Coast Chapter welcomed 15 new members at the 2019 Initial Training Class graduation on June 1 at Coletto Creek Park.

About 50 chapter members attended the graduation and potluck celebration.

The training class kicked off on Feb. 2 with an orientation meeting. The weather was a major factor for the 2019 class — a class in February was postponed because of near-freezing temperatures, and a May class was moved to Welder Wildlife Refuge after heavy rains closed roads at Fennessey Ranch.

Regina Payton was selected as the class representative on the chapter board.

She recalled that she met Bob Cunningham, Bill Burge and Joe Garland at an Aransas County historical lecture before the class had started.

"They were very enthusiastic and told me I would learn a lot, meet some fascinating people and go to interesting places." Regina said. "Check, check and check!"

Class member Janet Cunningham has filled the chapter treasurer position.

CLASS OF 2019

James Coquat, Aransas Pass
Janet Cunningham, Rockport
Rachael Diaz, Rockport
Dennis Durkee, Victoria
Debbie Griffith, Rockport
Mike Hejducek, Needville and Lamar
Charla Ingalls, Rockport
Roger Ingalls, Rockport
Regina Payton, Victoria
Carla Rinche, Rockport
Don Roach, Goliad
Sally Scroggs, Rockport
Gregory Simmons, Rockport
Nathalie Woolfrey, Rockport
Fred Woolfrey, Rockport

Three class members also received their Master Naturalist certification during the ceremony: Sally Scroggs, Gregory Simmons and Dennis Durkee.

Volunteers lead 2019 class out into field(s) of dreams



Interpreting Nature, April 13, RV Archimedes

The 2019 Initial Training Class was a success thanks to a large group of volunteers.

Bob Cunningham lead the program as initial training director.

Some chapter members who helped with classes: Brigid Berger, Alan Berger, Bill Burge, Norman Hirsch, Kris Kirkwood, Ray Kirkwood, Russ Miget, Janet Price,

Rob Snider and Ron Smudy.

Others who helped teach the class: Zach Piotrowski, Pam Wheat Stranahan, Elizabeth Neucere, Selma Glasscock, Angie Arredondo, Sarah Melendez, Steven Goertz, James Dodson, Whitney Curry, Erich Ehrlich, Charles Sassine, Richard David, Liz Smith and Nikki Davis.



Bay Ecology, March 30, Port O'Connor



Upland Ecology, March 9, Welder Wildlife Refuge



Mid-Coast Ecology, May 18, Aransas NWR



Coastal Ecology, March 16, Mad Island



Coastal Ecology, March 16, Mad Island



Bay Ecology, March 30, Port O'Connor



Riparian Ecology, May 11, Welder Wildlife Refuge



Mid-Coast Ecology, May 18, Aransas NWR

NEWS TO KNOW

Be prepared for hurricane season



Hurricane season is here! The official 2019 South Texas Hurricane Guide is now available from the National Weather Service's Corpus Christi office.

Scan this QR Code to download the free 32-page guide to your mobile device. Or go to www.weather.gov/crp and click Hurricane Guide.



Gulf red snapper project offers rewards

Gulf of Mexico fishermen out for red snapper this summer have a chance to contribute important data to one of the largest fisheries studies in the U.S. — and possibly snag a high-dollar reward in the process.

Researchers with the Great Red Snapper Count, a project led by the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies' Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation, was out on the water all spring tagging and releasing 4,000 legal-sized red snapper.

Reported tags are worth \$250 per fish, and some fish are double-tagged to estimate tag shedding rates. Double-tagged fish are worth \$500. But the data is worth so much more.

If you capture a tagged fish, whether you plan to keep or release it, clip and save the tag and record the date, the fish's length and weight, and the coordinates where the fish was caught. Then call the hotline printed on the tag to report your recapture and claim the reward.

The count is a two-year research project designed to estimate the abundance of red snapper in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. For more information: SnapperCount.org.

Radio show focuses on the outdoors



"Passport to Texas" is a daily radio program about Texas outdoors topics. The program is produced by Texas Parks and Wildlife, and you can catch it on the Coastal Bend's NPR affiliates. It airs at 4:34 p.m. Monday through Friday on KEDT 90.3 FM in Corpus Christi and KVRT 90.7 FM in Victoria.

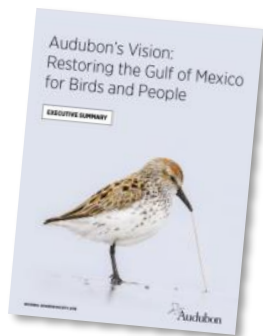
Audubon urges massive coast restoration

"The challenges are huge, but we have an enormous opportunity to save much of the Gulf Coast for both birds and people. We can't afford to blow this," said David Yarnold, president and CEO of National Audubon Society after the release of an extensive report, "Audubon's Vision: Restoring the Gulf of Mexico for Birds and People."

The report highlights projects and programs critical to help the region and its wildlife recover from devastating hurricanes, oil spills and other environmental and man-made disasters. At the center of the largest ecosystem restoration effort ever attempted, Audubon recommends an investment of more than \$1.7 billion in restoration and conservation efforts.

Audubon Texas, the state office of the society, identified critical priorities in the Lone Star State to confront challenges facing birds and their habitats. Audubon Texas is proposing four projects to manage, restore and even completely build the nearly 200 coastal islands.

For a full project list and details or to learn how to get involved, visit www.Audubon.org/gulf.



State organization celebrates 20th year at October meeting

The 20th Texas Master Naturalist Program Annual Meeting will be in Rockwall, Texas, and will run from Friday, Oct. 18 to Sunday, Oct. 20. The event will be hosted at the Hilton Dallas/Rockwall Lakefront Hotel on the shores of Lake Ray Hubbard just east of Dallas.

The annual meeting provides an opportunity for Texas Master Naturalist volunteers from around the state to gather, participate in hands-on educational seminars, and receive all of their Advanced Training requirements for the year within one weekend.

It's also an opportunity for program participants to network, share new ideas/projects, and to learn from different chapters across the state.

This year's meeting will

Texas Master Naturalist



20th Annual Meeting

also include day trips and training workshops to many local, state and even national refuges/parks, many of which will focus on the diversity of geography, flora, fauna and history in this unique area of North Texas.

Find registration and lodging information at <https://txmn.org/2019-annual-meeting/>

Texas voters can better fund state parks, historic sites

By CARLOS ANCHONDO
The Texas Tribune

State parks and historic sites across Texas could receive a much-needed bump in funding in the not-so-distant future.

In a big win for outdoor enthusiasts and day-trippers alike, legislation that would ensure that the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Historical Commission always get the maximum amount of money they are allowed to receive through a state sporting goods sales tax has passed both the House and Senate and headed to Gov. Greg Abbott's desk for his signature.

The legislation, which seeks to amend the Texas Constitution, also requires voter approval. The measure will appear on Texas ballots on Nov. 5, where it would need a simple majority to pass.

In 1993, state lawmakers passed legislation allowing up to 94 percent of the sporting goods sales tax to go to parks, with the remaining 6 percent designated for the state's historical commission, which maintains Texas' 22 historic sites.

However, in the following

decades, they allocated an average of just 40 percent of the tax to the parks system and used the rest to help balance the state budget, according to parks advocates.

From 1993 to 2017, Texas collected nearly \$2.5 billion in revenue from the sporting goods sales tax, but lawmakers allocated only about \$1 billion of that to state parks.

State Sen. Lois Kolhorst, R-Brenham, and state Rep. John Cyrier, R-Lockhart, worked together on Senate Bill 26 and Senate Joint Resolution 24, which they said would help agencies like the TPWD and the THC plan long term for repairs, projects and new parks.

Kolhorst — whose district includes a number of state parks, including Goliad State Park — said the legislation is about ensuring that all Texans can enjoy the state's natural areas.

A spokeswoman for TPWD said it is still too early for the agency to comment on improvements at specific sites, but longtime parks advocates say more funding would help repair overburdened roads, bathrooms, bridges and trails.

South Texas ocelot expert: If we don't act now, 'they're likely to disappear'

By DAVID FREY
The Wildlife Society

In his 35 years studying ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*), 42-year TWS member Michael Tewes has seen plenty of efforts to conserve them in his home state of Texas, but they haven't had much success. The endangered wild cat, a tawny and spotted animal weighing about 20 pounds, continues to struggle, despite expanding refuges, road-crossing structures and other efforts undertaken to help them survive.

"We're missing the target," said Tewes, the Frank D. Yturria endowed chair in wild cat studies and regents professor at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. "It's like we're throwing darts at a bull's-eye and we're hitting the area on the outer circle. I'm urging that we start hitting the bull's-eye."

Invited by the Kingsville campus to deliver the annual faculty lecture, Tewes threw his darts at where he believes Texas ocelot conservation is "on the wrong track," and where it ought to focus on saving the species before its time runs out.

"If we're not able to increase the carrying capacity to sustain the ups and downs that occur with population variability, they're likely to disappear within the next 50 years," Tewes said.

Ocelots range deep into South America, but they're imperiled in every country in which they're found. In the United States, they occur in only Arizona and Texas, both of which list them as species of greatest conservation need. A few male individuals have been spotted in Arizona. The only known breeding population in the U.S. lives in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Tewes estimates fewer than 80 individuals roam the Texas thornscrub. The Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge typically supports seven to 14 individuals, Tewes believes. The rest occupy private ranchlands. Yet most recovery efforts are focused in and around the refuge area.

In his presentation, Tewes called for an "ecologically equivalent 'Manhattan Project' for ocelot recovery," focusing less on one refuge and more on the handful of ranches where most of the cats occur. It would be a uniquely Texas approach, designed for a state where 97 percent of the land is in private hands.

Most ranchers are willing to help conserve the ocelot, he said, but they're wary of government regulations.

"I'm really trying to emphasize a much more strategic and targeted ap-



Michael Tewes, of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, has studied ocelots for 35 years. He grew up in Odem in San Patricio County.

proach for ocelot recovery," he said. "It comes down to the 80 percent of the ocelot population that occurs on private lands that have mostly been ignored for the past century."

The Laguna Atascosa refuge is mostly surrounded by open coastal prairies, wetlands and increasing urbanization, which offers little chance for the refuge population to grow, Tewes said. Four efforts focused there — landscape corridors, habitat restoration, road-crossing structures and translocation efforts — have failed to provide a meaningful benefit, Tewes concluded, or made a significant difference for ocelot recovery. Instead, they offered an "illusion of achievement," he said, that cost millions of dollars while habitat continues to decrease.

"Private land provides native rangelands with cover and prey," he said. "The habitats are more interconnected. By definition, the ranches will be barriers to increasing roads and increasing human populations. They provide a security buffer decades into the future, which is in stark contrast to the refuge population."

Tewes grew up in Odem, 35 miles north of Kingsville. He began working with ocelots in 1981, during the first year of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute's operations. The most important day of his professional life, he says, was March 2, 1982, when he trapped his first ocelot.

IN THE KNOW

Sign up for eNews from the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute: <https://marketing-suite.verticalresponse.com/s/websitesignupform08012018114507am>

ABOUT THE OCELOT

DIET

Ocelots are carnivores, they hunt and eat animals such as rodents, rabbits, young deer, birds, snakes and fish.

POPULATION

An estimated 800,000 to 1.5 million worldwide. In the U.S., just around 50 remain in an isolated population in south Texas.

RANGE

Once in Arkansas and Louisiana, throughout Texas and in Mexico, ocelots are currently found only in extreme southern Texas and northeastern Mexico. They are found in every country south of the U.S. except Chile.

BEHAVIOR

Ocelots are strongly nocturnal, resting in trees or dense brush during the day. Ocelots are very active, traveling from one to five miles per night. They capture an average of one prey item for every 3.1 hours of travel.

REPRODUCTION

Following a 79- to 85-day gestation, young are born in litters of one to three. Kittens are independent after about one year.

— *Defenders of Wildlife*