Mid-Coast UPDATE

Newsletter of the Mid-Coast Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists

WINTER 2021-2022

DECEMBER 2021



Our mission: Education, Outreach, Service

UPCOMING

Mid-Coast Chapter
Board Meeting
January 8, 2022 at 10:00 a.m.
All members are welcome to attend.
Details to be announced

Class of 2022 Potluck Lunch January 29, 2022

Bauer Exhibit Center Calhoun County Fair Ground Check the M-C TMN website for more information

Mid-Coast Chapter General Membership Meeting February 12, 2022 at 10:00 a.m. Texana Park Campground 344 Park Road 2, Edna Texas

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Snake Doctors to Devil's Darning Needle: Dragonfly Folklore

By Linda Shirey

When I was growing up in northeast Texas, dragonflies were called "snake doctors." To this day I still have to remember to call them dragonflies instead of snake doctors. I asked a TMN friend if she had ever heard of dragonflies being called snake doctors. She looked at me like I was crazy. So one day I was curious and googled "snake doctors." I was surprised by the number of nicknames for dragonflies and by the origins of the nicknames. The more I read, the more interested I became because of the and numerous often conflicting - legends and characterizations. I've tried to winnow the information to a concise and representative discussion of the folklore.

In Europe and some parts of the United States, a lot of the folklore depicts dragonflies as evil. On the Isle of Wight, dragonflies historically were believed to sting naughty children if they went near the water. However, the truth is that dragonflies do not have stingers. They belong to the order Odonata (toothy ones) and have serrated teeth. Although they can bite if threatened, the bite probably will not break the skin.

A Swedish name is "devil's steelyard," which probably refers to the dragonfly's body shape, which resembles a balancing scale. According to myth if a dragonfly flew around your head, the devil was weighing your soul, and you could expect a painful sting if found lacking. Despite the ideas that the dragonfly was a tool of the devil, in parts of Scandinavia it was considered to be a holy animal. In Romania and Germany,



Photo by LINDA SWICKHEIMER

there are legends of horses being turned into dragonflies. One from Germany tells of a wild, selfish princess who raced her horse recklessly around the countryside. One day she ran over a man with her horse. As she rode away, the man cursed her that she always be joined to her horse, and they were transformed into a dragonfly.

I found 25 nicknames for dragonflies from around the United States. Variations of "darning needle" are very common. These names probably come from the long narrow shape of the dragonfly and the way it flies back and forth over the same area like a needle does when darning a sock. This flying pattern also led to the that dragonflies are looking below the surface and for some deeper meaning. Some other myths relating to the needle are not so benign. Some believed that a dragonfly could sew together fingers and toes if a person slept near a dragonfly or their hands and toes were exposed while they slept. It also was believed that they could sew up the mouths of "scolding women, saucy children, and profane men" (Animal and Plant Lore, 1899) and the ears of truant schoolboys. People would try to frighten children into behaving by telling them that dragonflies would cut off their ears if they lied or sew their eyes shut if Continued on page 2



they didn't behave.

killer," and "bee butcher." These come from clothing and helmets of samurai. dragonflies flying around horses. Two old myths A dragonfly spends up to two years of its life in were that dragonflies killed mules and sucked the the water in a larval stage. In this stage they eat blood of horses. The "bee butcher" name is based tadpoles, mosquitoes, fish other insect larvae, and on fact because dragonflies will eat bees. Probably even other dragonflies. At the end of the larval the best thing dragonflies eat is mosquitoes, hence stage it crawls out of the water. Its exoskeleton their nickname "mosquito hawk." In one day a breaks open and the dragonfly emerges abdomen single dragonfly can eat hundreds of mosquitoes, first, then wings. Its life as a dragonfly lasts which they catch in mid-air with their feet.

35 mph (45 mph in one source), making them the virtue of living life to the fullest. fastest flying insect. Because of their aerial skills, As you know, the emblem of Texas Master they are called "helicopter," "airplane bug," and Naturalists is a dragonfly - not just any dragonfly "airplane fly." They mate in mid-air but I found but the no nicknames for that feat. They form a heart- pentacantha). Why a dragonfly and this one in shape when mating and were the emblem of particular? Dragonflies are beautiful, interesting Freya, goddess of love in Norse mythology.

Other beliefs not associated with a particular everyone is familiar with dragonflies. The Cyrano nickname are that dragonflies indicate where the Darner has the classic shape and beautiful fishing is good; if a dragonfly lands on a fishing coloration. The venation in the wings makes it pole, the fisherman will have success. The color of easy to imagine a 19th century naturalist's field the dragonfly indicates which fish will bite. notebook, a look that TMN founders wanted to However, I also found that some believe that fish achieve. They wanted a logo that wouldn't be won't bite if dragonflies are around. I guess confused with other nature organizations. (Thanks whether you catch fish or not, you can thank/ to Ron Smudy for this information.) blame the dragonflies. Some believe dragonflies One last thought, dragonflies may or may not be heavy. If they fly low, the rain will be light.

Dragonflies represent good luck and prosperity. If you catch a dragonfly, you will marry within a year. If you make a wish on a dragonfly, the wish will come true. Dragonflies represent supernatural beings and should be left alone at all costs. Even if they are not supernatural, they should be left alone because they provide a great service to the environment by eating many nuisance insects,.

Among Native Americans dragonflies are a sign of happiness, activity, speed, and purity. They signify water in Navajo sand paintings. In Zuni culture dragonflies have supernatural powers and are represented in their pottery as a double-barred cross. One Native American myth says that dragonflies were originally dragons. A coyote tricked a dragon into shapeshifting into a dragonfly and it couldn't change back. So a dragonfly represents change and speed. The Tlingit carve dragonflies into their totem poles, and the Yaqui have a dragonfly dance.

The dragonfly is revered in most Asian cultures. In China it represents change, happiness, and new beginnings. Dragonflies are used in feng shui to bring new insight and positive change.

In Japan dragonflies are symbolic of happiness, There are several nicknames strength, courage, and success. They are related to snakes because sometimes mentioned in haiku poetry. dragonflies and snakes are often Buddhist celebration Obon, which honors one's seen at the same ponds. One ancestors, occurs about the same time as belief was that the dragonflies thousands of dragonflies appear. Some believe warned the snakes of danger. that the ancestral spirits ride the dragonflies or that The name "snake doctor" comes the dragonflies are the spirits themselves. One from the belief that a dragonfly legend from Japan is that Emperor Jinmu, the could heal a snake's injuries mythical founder of Japan, was bitten by a deadly especially if the snake was in pieces. The two mosquito but was saved because a dragonfly ate bumps behind the wings were thought to be the mosquito. The samurai respected the dragonfly saddlebags that carried medicine for snakes (Some for its hunting technique of flying directly toward <u>Peculiarities of Speech in Mississippi, 1893).</u> its prey and never wavering from its target. Other nicknames are "horse stinger," "mule Dragonfly emblems were often seen on the

usually one to two weeks. It spends most of that Other nicknames refer to their flight. Dragonflies time eating and mating. Because of its short life can fly straight up and down, hover, and fly up to span, the dragonfly has come to represent the

> Cyrano Darner (Nasiaeschna creatures that are widely distributed. Almost

predict rainfall. If they fly high, rain will be supernatural, but the next time you see one, make a wish. Who knows what might happen?



All Photos by LINDA SWICKHEIMER



MC-TMN Newsletter - President's Column Bob Cunningham, Dec 6, 2021

It's the season for looking back and looking forward. Over the last couple years, we've dealt with continued challenges of a Covid-imbued world. We've learned how to meet remotely using Zoom, and hope to incorporate a virtual component in future

meetings and training. But it was so delightful to join together in person after a long hiatus, for our well-attended Chapter meeting and potluck in November! For those who missed it, minutes are on the Chapter website here: https://midcoast-tmn.org/members-landing/minutes/.

Looking forward, our 2022 Initial Training program will provide both virtual classroom and outdoor field sessions. Kudos to directors Greg Simmons & Sally Scroggs for securing the training schedule already, posted here: https://midcoast-tmn.org/members-landing/basic/.

At this writing the Class of 2022 is almost full with only a couple slots left. Please encourage anyone you know who is interested to submit their application and send payment asap. And mark your calendar for January 29th to show support for the new class with potluck lunch at the Orientation session at Bauer Exhibit Building in Port Lavaca.

Members are always welcome at the Board meetings. The meeting on January 8th (venue TBD) will feature budgeting for the upcoming year, including discussion of whether our Chapter has the funds and/or skills to conduct hybrid virtual access for our live meetings.

As we return to in-person meetings, our virtual experience highlighted the need to ensure exposure to all areas of this widespread Chapter. So our next Chapter meeting on February 12th, will be held at the newly renovated education center at Texana Lake & Campground in Edna. More convenient for many of our inland members, and time for us south coastal folks to tackle a longer drive!

Meanwhile, our Diversity-Equity-Inclusion committee is addressing this issue of expanded service as a first priority. Please respond if contacted by them to offer input on how we might improve outreach to underserved areas and populations in our Chapter region.

More imminently, birding activities are in high gear. Looking at the Christmas bird count events on Audubon's website, special credit is due to MC-TMN members Brent Ortego, Bob Friedrichs, and Claudia Dorn for their leadership roles. Dates, summary and contact info here:

https://houstonaudubon.org/birding/christmas-bird-counts/

Finally, there's just a few days left to fulfill requirements for annual certification: 40 hrs volunteer service, 8 hrs. of advanced training. Check out the virtual training available from TMN Tuesday / Be the Change presentations if short of AT credits. And stay alert for e-mail blasts with last gasp VS events, or create your own approved project. No time left to procrastinate!

Best wishes for the holidays as we say goodbye to 2021 and welcome to the New Year!

Membership Meeting Potluck, In Person, Finally!



TMN 2021 Photo, Art, & Media Contest Mid-Coast Chapter Winners



Photography: Naturalists at Work and Play First Place

"Uri's Unprecedented Cold-Stunned Sea Turtle Rescue Operations"

Photo by D'Ann Williams



Photography: Plants Second Place "Prickly Pear at Dawn" Photo by Ele Chew

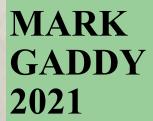


The President's Call To Service Award:

Congratulations to Allan Berger for receiving this award for 4000 hours of volunteer service. A certificate, a letter from the President of the United States, and the Call To Service pin with the Presidential Seal was presented to Allan at our fall chapter meeting.



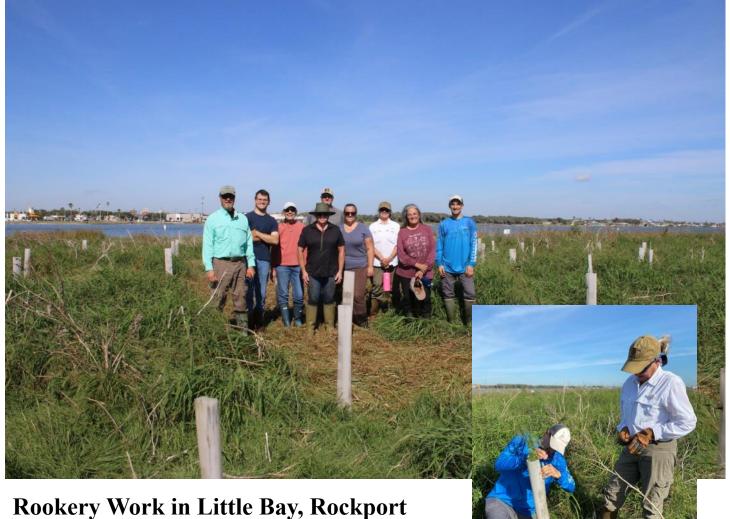
KIM GADDY 2021





DEE MAHAFFEY 2020

SANDRA GARCIA 2020



New Service Opportunity: The Matagorda County Birding Nature Center (MCBNC) is planning a new Monarch Waystation, and volunteers are requested to help with installation and maintenance. If interested, please contact Sara Huebner with the MCBNC at saraleehuebner@gmail.com.

Report as **RM**: Other Locations and include Monarchs & Milkweeds project, MCBNC Monarch Waystation in the description.

