

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™Member
News

March 2018

Getting to Know Fellow Members

LEARN ABOUT PROJECTS AND YOUR FELLOW MEMBERS

As I was preparing this newsletter, I was struck by how interesting some of our members are and how I appreciate the opportunity to get to know them better.

Paul Meredith has been a Mid-Coast TMN member since 2005. He had a varied education and experience in the worlds of accounting and finance before finally settling down with Mary in Lafayette, Louisiana and becoming head of a Research Lab. He is one of four volunteer curators for the Bees and Wasps of Texas Projects and a serious advocate for protecting those species.

Beth Hudson wrote an article on the Pollinator Garden at Coletto Creek. She lives in Victoria now, having grown up in Sinton. As a retired teacher, she and her husband, a retired newspaper man, enjoy traveling and volunteering in our park system. One claim to fame is that she holds the title "Miss Seaweed 1964" being the most cooperative swimmer at Girl Scout Camp Copano in Rockport.

Linda Shirey has been a Master Naturalist since 2013 and on the board for many years. She is very quiet and soft-spoken, but has a very adventurous spirit. She used to be a motorcyclist and still is a diver. She takes exotic vacations to places such as Bali and the Maldives. She combined her diving skills and interests in her volunteer work at the Texas State Aquarium.

Last month, we featured an article contributed by Barbara Mathis. Barbara races sailboats and has a variety of interests. She volunteers at Padre Island Natural Seashore (PINS) for the turtle projects. She has helped to perform necropsies on turtles, discovered her own nesting Ridley turtle, helped save many cold-stunned turtles, and is learning to be an "egggrunner" for PINS.

Join your fellow members and experience their adventures in nature.

Editor, Pat Garland

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Paul Meredith Finds Fly Not Seen Since 1928

By Pat Garland

Master Naturalist Paul Meredith found an insect no one has documented since 1928 or ever photographed in the United States. Since retiring in 2003 from running a research lab at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette, he moved to Victoria and spends much of his day studying and photographing nature. Paul found the unusual insect on a Carolina Buckthorn (*Frangula caroliniana*) in his yard in July of 2017. The blooms of this plant are only 1/8" across and only a few species can nectar on such small blooms. As one of the four curators for Bees and Wasps of Texas, Paul was interested to try to identify the species, which initially looked like a wasp.

Paul noticed the antenna were club-shaped and that the insect had two wings on either side of the thorax. He knew that wasps have four wings and the antenna are not club-shaped, so he was able to rule out this insect as a wasp and determine it was some type of fly. He posted a picture on Bugguide.Net and let the expert entomologists help him identify it.

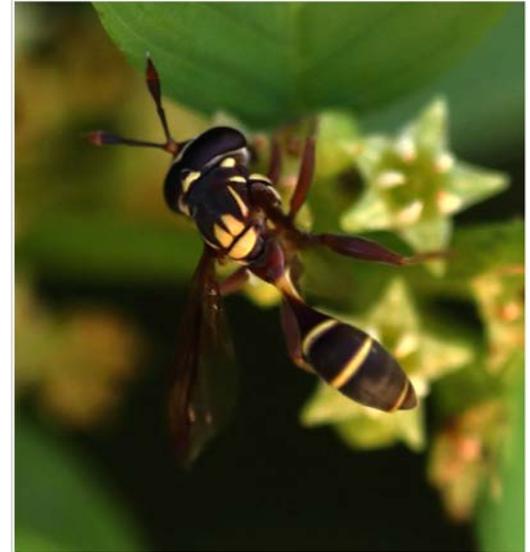
The first expert to look at it moved it into the Syrphid fly family. Ken Wolgemuth refined it to Cerioidini, a tribe within the syrphids. Over six months later, Martin Hauser, a PhD dipterist (fly expert) made the final species id. He referred to the *Polybiomyia* key in Shannon (1925) and found that the fly matched to *Polybiomyia macquarti* species.

The fly Paul photographed is likely a female because the eyes are well-separated and the pre-scutellar spot between the eyes takes the form of a *single* trapezoidal spot. The range of *P. macquarti* was listed as Texas and Mexico. Shannon (1925) gave a specimen record from Brownsville, TX on June 5, 1904; while Hull (1930) gave an August 30th, 1928 specimen record from Beeville, TX. Meredith speculates that global warming has caused the species to expand its range further north.

No picture had ever been submitted of this species in the United States, nor had it been identified or published on iNaturalist, BugGuide, or Discover Life's websites. This species is described as a Central and South American species spotted in South Texas only twice. Paul stated there are several morals to this story. "*Always take a camera to the field, be patient and take a lot of pictures when you find something interesting, and if you don't know what you found, ask the experts. Most are nice folks and happy to help.*"

Paul Meredith and his deceased wife, Mary, have been Master Naturalists in the Mid-Coast Chapter since 2005. Both were members of the Matagorda Island Turtle Patrol team and found the first nest of the endangered Kemp's Ridley sea turtle on Matagorda Island. Paul and Mary collected the first specimens of neurotoxin-carrying *Pseudonitzschia pungens* ever found in the Gulf of Mexico. They also wrote articles about the natural world for the Victoria Advocate.

RARE FLY FOUND BY PAUL MEREDITH



Rare *P. macquarti* fly on Carolina Buckhorn

This fly has ever before photographed in the U.S., nor documented since 1928.

Photo by Paul Meredith



Mary and Paul Meredith

Paul made his rare discovery in July 2017.

Photo by Earl Nottingham, TPWD
Photographer

Volunteer Diving at the Texas State Aquarium

By Linda Shirey

Are you a certified diver but don't get to dive as often as you would like? Become a dive volunteer at Texas State Aquarium and you can dive every week. You are guaranteed to see lots of fish and other sea creatures.

I started diving at TSA in 1993 but my job transferred me away and I didn't get to start again until 2008. I dive mainly in the Flower Gardens exhibit. It replicates the Flower Gardens Banks National Marine Sanctuary in the Gulf of Mexico. It is a 40,000-gallon exhibit that has many types of fish, including a puffer named Hagrid that is about 18 inches long (see photo).

The exhibit contains simulated coral made from concrete and fiberglass that needs cleaning often, and the walls and windows must also be cleaned. Cleaning the windows is my least favorite thing to do because I have to use a suction cup to hold myself close to the windows to be able to wipe them.



Linda Shirey diving and feeding the pufferfish, Hagrid, at the Texas State Aquarium.

During a dive, I wear a full face mask that has earphones and a microphone so that I can communicate with the tender, who is a safety person outside the exhibit. The air hose is long and attached to the air cylinder outside the exhibit. I wear a 5-mm wetsuit because the water is in the low 70s, but I don't wear fins because the exhibit is too small. One of the fun things is interacting with the visitors outside the exhibit. Some of the children are really excited to see me and wave enthusiastically. Some of the smaller children think I am the creature from the black lagoon, and they hide behind their parents.

Two other exhibits that volunteers can dive in are the Islands of Steel, which is the largest exhibit in the Gulf of Mexico side of TSA, and Tortuga Cay, which has several sea turtles. In those exhibits divers wear full scuba gear.

The Islands of Steel replicates the legs of an offshore oil rig and contains large fish such as grouper, red snapper, and barracuda, and two sand tiger sharks. Other smaller exhibits that volunteers dive in include the "leg" and the schooling tank. Some smaller exhibits are cleaned by snorkeling.

Texas State Aquarium has many volunteer opportunities besides diving. Check out the opportunities on their website at www.txstateaq.org.

Texas State Aquarium Adult Volunteer Opportunities

Naturalist

Naturalists are volunteer guides who share their knowledge of the Aquarium animals and habitats with the guests. The only thing you need to bring is enthusiasm and the ability to work a 3-hour shift once a week. TSA provides the training.

Guest Ambassadors

Guest Ambassadors assist in welcoming guests and assisting them with direction and general information about the Aquarium as well as conducting surveys and learning to interact with guests using our BioFact carts

Animal Husbandry

Animal Husbandry includes the areas of fish/invertebrates/reptiles, birds, small mammals, and wildlife care rehabilitation. You must have the ability to work a 4-hour shift and maintain a fairly regular schedule. Volunteers help prepare food for the animals and keep the animals healthy and the exhibits clean.

Dive

Dive volunteers help to maintain exhibits and assist with programming. Divers must be Open-Water dive certified, will need a doctor's clearance, and be able to pass a check-out dive. Divers get credit for bottom time and overall volunteer time.

Administrative

Administrative volunteers stuff envelopes and packets, do office work, filing, file conversion to electronic storage, prepare mail-outs, and may do some computer work.

Education

Education volunteers help out with outreach programs and special projects are needed. Activities are indoor and outdoor.

Volunteers Wanted at Coletto Creek Park

By Beth Flinn Hudson

Have you ever been to Coletto Creek Park and Reservoir? Have you visited there lately?

Located between Victoria and Goliad, off U.S. Highway 59 south, it's a lovely little day trip for many and a welcoming place to invest some of your volunteer hours.

With a relaxed fishing-camp atmosphere, the park offers a boat ramp, fish-cleaning station, day picnic area, overnight camping for tents and trailers; or, some rustic cabins. The park is home to a nature trail, a pollinator garden and two bird observation blinds—the latter established by The Victoria Photography Club.

In the last few months, I've worked with Anita Brunsting and Lisa Devries, who are also Mid-Coast Chapter Naturalists, to revitalize the pollinator garden by Pavilion C. We have weeded the large bed and covered it with weed barrier and mulch.

Regular maintenance on this garden will ensure it continues to be a park asset. We are planning to replant and establish an easy and educational labeling system. Red Sage, Cowpen Daisy, Agave, Red Yucca, Inland SeaOats, Yaupon Holly and a Wafer Ashtree are currently growing in the garden. We have American Beautyberry, Texas Lantana, Milkweed and Turk's Cap to add.



Outreach and volunteerism go hand in hand as a young park host helps out.

Consideration is being given to planting small natural grasses in the lower tiered section of the garden. If you have native plants to donate, please let us know. A big "Thank you!" goes out to Pat Garland for the first donation of new plants.

Coletto Creek Reservoir

Vast land & reservoir recreation space with trails, beaches, sports areas, picnic tables & camping.

Address: 365 Coletto Park Rd, Victoria, TX 77905

Phone: (361) 575-6366

The nature trail is also getting a redesign. Mowed regularly by the park staff, it is a gentle 1.5-mile stroll through woods and grasslands and affords several scenic views of the lake.

The current trailhead lacks sufficient room for parking. It will be relocated to the former trail terminus that has

"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world."

(John Muir)

a large circular parking area and restroom facilities. This part of the trail begins with an impressive alley of live oaks.



The pollinator garden sits near Pavilion C in the center of the camping action for excellent access to the water and outreach to park visitors.

In the warmer months, woodland and meadow wildflowers make a grand showing. Work has been done to identify trees along the hike. Ideas for sharing wildflower data, especially since it is seasonal, is under consideration. Volunteer input is welcome.

As nature will, it takes things back as quickly as you can claim them and these special accessible areas need regular monitoring and maintenance. That's where we can come in with our volunteer time. Won't you join us?

Beth grew up in the area and has recently relocated here from the Texas Panhandle where she received her Texas Master Naturalist Training.



Pollinator on Hog Plum