

The Midden

Photo by Dick Benoit

Galveston Bay Area Chapter - Texas Master Naturalists

February 2011

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President's message by Diane Humes, President 2011

Last year went out with excitement - a total lunar eclipse exactly on the winter solstice, Dec. 21, 2010. This is quite a rare event that has not happened since Dec. 21, 1638, and will not happen again until Dec. 21, 2094. What a way to end a fantastic year!

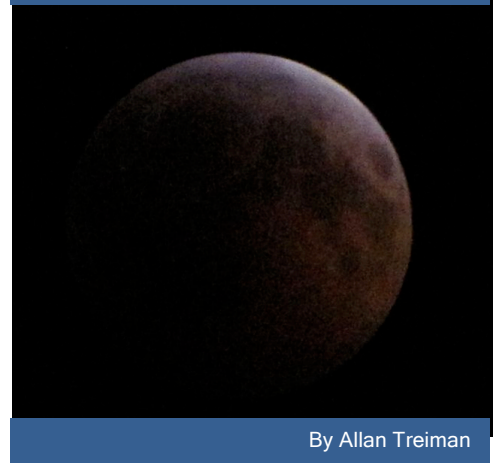
I would like to congratulate everyone in the Galveston Bay Area Chapter for an outstanding year in 2010. We have surpassed ourselves in many ways, not least of which is the highest total ever recorded for chapter volunteer service hours - 24,772.20! We have 178 paid members, 19 members of the 2010 training class are already certified, 105 members re-certified, and 40 members earned a milestone award!!

Your Board is getting ready to roll for the New Year. Verva, Tawy, Nelda and I have a bit of experience now - may be said to know what we are doing - and are ready to get to work. Please feel free to offer suggestions and advice; we can always use help, but we are beginning well, if I do say so. The AT Team is already lining up a full year of Advanced Training, the Education Team has the new training class ready to go, Stewardship never lacks for work to do, Verva is planning our meetings, and Nelda is finalizing the budget to pay for it all.

This year marks our Chapter's 10th anniversary year. This is a huge accomplishment, and I hope we can celebrate in a big way. I will be asking anyone who is interested to join the Anniversary Committee to plan some celebratory activities. Please come forward with those creative ideas - your Chapter is calling you.

Jim Duron, Membership Chair, who cheerfully counts and saves all our hours, has given me a calculation of the total Chapter hours from inception until now. Collectively, we have amassed 24,294.5 AT hours and a whopping 169,814.5 Volunteer Service hours, valued at \$3,540,632. Good job, everyone! Keep up the good work and all that food, fun and friendship. Happy New Year to all.

Total lunar eclipse



By Allan Treiman

Next Chapter Meeting

February 3, 2011
Carbide Park

Backyard Wildlife Habitats

By Chris LaChance
Watersmart Coordinator
AgriLife Extension

Bring a dish to share

February and March Activities

ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Chapter Meeting - Thursday, Feb. 3

Carbide Park
 Backyard Wildlife Habitats
 Chris LaChance, Watersmart Coordinator, AgriLife Extension
 6:30 Social, 7:00 Presentation, 8:00 business meeting
 1 Hour AT

Ridley's Believe It or Not: Sea Turtles of the Gulf of Mexico - Saturday, Feb. 19

Dickinson Extension Office
 1-4 p.m. 3 Hours AT
 Cost: Free
 Class limit: 30
 Get ready for 2011 sea turtle nesting season. Signup available at February Chapter Meeting.
 Assorted presenters
 Project lead: Mel Measeles measeles@swbell.net
 Registration: Emmeline Dodd TXDODD@aol.com
 Signup begins at the February Chapter Meeting.

Hook 'Em Horns - Friday, Feb. 25

Longhorn Project at Johnson Space Center
 9:30 a.m. to noon 2.5 Hours AT
 Cost: Free
 Volunteer training to assist with CCISD school field trips to the project.
 Presenter: Longhorn Project staff
 Project lead: Emmeline Dodd
 Registration: Or for more information, contact Emmeline Dodd TXDODD@aol.com
 Signup begins at the February Chapter Meeting.

FoGISP Training - Saturday, March 5

Nature Center Galveston Island State Park
 9 a.m.-1 p.m. 4 hours AT
 Cost: Free
 Friends of Galveston Island State Park will review procedures and train those wishing to volunteer to man the Nature Center. Mid-March through November, volunteering at GISP will be an ongoing activity.
 Project lead: Nathan Veatch nveatch@swbell.net
 Registration: Emmeline Dodd TXDODD@aol.com
 Signup begins at the February Chapter Meeting.

Raptors of Galveston Bay - Monday, March 7

Dickinson Extension Office
 6:30-9:30 p.m. 3 hours AT
 Presenters: Dick Benoit, Diane Humes, Margaret Pickell
 Cost: Free
 Class limit: 40
 Learning about hawks and owls in the classroom.
 Project lead: Ellen Gerloff egerloff@sbcglobal.net
 Registration: Emmeline Dodd TXDODD@aol.com

Signup begins at the February Chapter Meeting.

Trinity River Boat Trip - Thursday, March 17 (tentative)

Anahuac Harbor
 9 a.m.-1 p.m. 4 hours AT
 Presenter: Waterborne Education Center
 Class limit: 25
 Cost: \$40 (or less, pending scholarship funding)
 Activities include seining, trawls and plankton tow.
 Project lead: Frank Budny fmbmab@verizon.net
 More information and signup will be available at the February Chapter Meeting.

Water Monitoring Workshop - Saturday, March 19

Challenger Park
 9 a.m.-4 p.m. 6 hours AT
 Presenter: Mel Measeles
 Class limit: 15
 Hands-on workshop for anyone concerned about the quality of water in our area. There will be an opportunity to become a Citizen Scientist and learn water testing.
 Project lead: Mel Measeles measeles@swbell.net
 Registration: Emmeline Dodd TXDODD@aol.com
 Signup begins at the February Chapter Meeting.

Ongoing

Heritage Book Study Group
 First Monday of every month
 Texas City Prairie Preserve
 10am-Noon 2 hours AT
 Contact: Elsie Smith (409) 945-4731
 We are currently reading:
The Wilderness World of John Muir, edited by Edwin Way Teale

STEWARDSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Project of the Year:

To be announced at the Chapter Meeting

For more information, contact Dick Benoit
rbenoit@aol.com

Mondays - Reitan Point, second and fourth, contact Liz Gimmler gimmler@consolidated.net

Tuesdays -

- Sheldon Lakes State Park, contact Tom Solomon crandtr@sbcglobal.net
- Texas City Prairie Preserve, contact Jim Duron, wishkad@yahoo.com

Wednesdays - Wetland Restoration Team, contact Marissa Sipocz m-sipocz@tamu.edu

Fridays - Prairie Friday, ABNC, 9 - Noon Contact: Dick Benoit RBenoitTEX@aol.com

EDUCATION-OUTREACH VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Bay & Island Adventures - Volunteers teach six in-class, hands-on modules (water, Galveston Bay, wetlands, coastal prairies, birds, Gulf of Mexico) on a once a month basis in Dickinson and Galveston Schools. Presenters and helpers are needed for eleven 4th- and 5th-grade classes. Contact: Sara Snell snellsw@verizon.net.

Education and Outreach Committee - Lots of work to do and we can use your help developing a speakers

bureau; responding to requests for exhibit booths, fieldtrip guides and presenters, planning Camp Wild and Treasures of the Bay; and developing a library of education-outreach materials. Contact Sara Snell snellsw@verizon.net.

Partner and Associate Programs - Many organizations sponsor guided walks and education programs or need volunteers to man their nature center. Go to www.gbamasternaturalist.org click on "Volunteer Opportunities," then click on "Partners, Sponsors and Associates" for the list, then click on their website for information and contact.

Prairie Ponderings by Dick Benoit

Another banner year of prairie restoration in the Galveston Bay Area thanks to the dedicated people involved. Our chapter helped complete the project at Galveston Island State Park, which was our project of the year in 2009, but which extended until June of 2010. We also began our 2010-2011 project of the year on the Bolivar Peninsula helping Houston Audubon restore the Horseshoe Marsh Prairie area. Our main effort still continued to be at Armand Bayou Nature Area, Texas City Prairie, and Sheldon State Park.

Armand Bayou Nature Area planted about 15,500 one-gallon plants, which impacted 31 acres. Tom Solomon, Jim Duron, and the Stewardship staff led the more than 20 volunteers in this project that netted over



3,000 volunteer hours. This project continues to grow over the past 11 years as more people become involved with habitat restoration.

Sheldon State Park planted about 13,000 one-gallon plants, which impacted 25 acres. Tom Solomon, Jim Duron, and the Park Staff led more than 15 volunteers in this project that accumulated about 2,300 volunteer hours. The uniqueness of this project is that the

restoration has a geology component. The area has been earth moved to original contours using photos of pre-agricultural times. Also it is articulated with The Wetland Restoration Team in the overall plan. As of this writing many of the migratory bird species are again returning to this restoration in progress. (Editor's Note: Marissa Sipocz of the Wetland Education Team has announced: "The annual winter bird count volunteers on Saturday, January 8th recorded 4 Sandhill Cranes in Pond 10 (Phase II). This is record for the park and a very important benchmark for the restoration effort, in general. Our prairie wetland restoration effort has not been ignored, but rather is greatly appreciated by the THOUSANDS of geese and HUNDREDS of ducks, plus the Cranes!!" Read more on Sandhill cranes on page 7.)

Texas City Prairie Preserve planted about 2,400 one-gallon plants, which impacted about 5 acres. Marybeth Arnold, assisted by Rob Moy and Sara Snell, have provided leadership to about ten volunteers, who amassed about 850 volunteer hours in this attempt to provide habitat for the endangered Prairie Chicken. Much of our original plant materials were from rescue sites, areas that were scheduled for bulldozing, and areas located with native plants. Permission was granted to remove these plants. But as we progress more plants are raised from seeds of native plants in the area and which provide more diversity. Hopefully we will have another productive year in the area and continue to provide stewardship of our native prairies.

Wetland Wanderings: Restoring America's Estuaries by Diane Humes

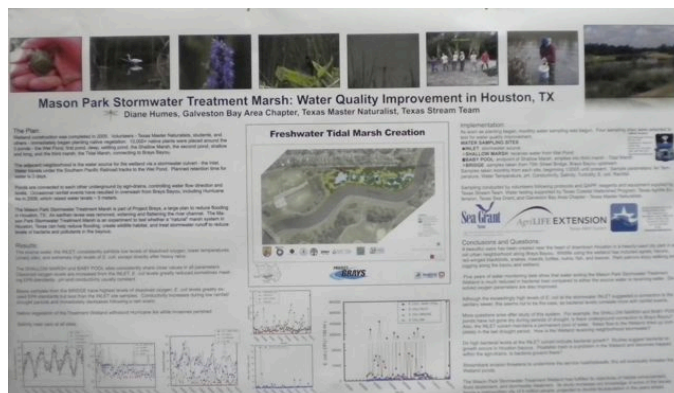
The 5th National Conference on Coastal and Estuarine Restoration convened in Galveston from Nov. 13-17, 2010. Julie Massey, Dick Benoit, and I were among the 900+ attendees at the largest national conference and exposition dedicated to the topic of coastal habitat restoration. We heard speakers from around the Gulf of Mexico and beyond discuss projects and pitfalls of coastal habitat restoration from the perspectives of policy-makers and volunteers, scientists and students.

Two sessions that I attended stick out in my mind. The first by "Save the Bay", a nonprofit organization based in San Francisco, CA, described their volunteer groups' successes with plant propagation toward their restoration efforts. They are now constructing their **third** greenhouse facility and produce plants by the thousands every year. Group structure is very similar to that of our groups at TCCP, Sheldon Lake SP, and ABNC/Prairie Friday. While not using the words "food, fun and friendship," clearly this is key to the success of the core group, along with reliance on skills and leadership from the volunteers. <http://www.savesfbay.org/>

The second session discussed the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the incredible biodiversity of the Gulf of Mexico. A 2009 publication, "Gulf of Mexico Origin, Waters, and Biota: Volume 1, Biodiversity," lists 15,419 species in 40 phyla living in the Gulf of Mexico. Within the depths of Deepwater Horizon, where 53,508,000 gallons of uncontained oil remain (24% of the spill) and 2,000,000 gallons of chemical dispersants were used, 135 unique species, including 74 endangered or threatened species reside.

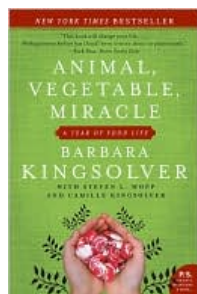
Although much remains unknown about the effects of the spill and cleanup, very little of the oil that made it to shore penetrated into the interior marshes, so it is hoped that impacts will be minimal to the coast. If the marsh vegetation were to die, the shoreline could erode before natural recruitment of vegetation could occur, particularly in Louisiana where most of the oil washed up. See the YouTube video: "Oil Spill Impacts on Coastal Wetlands of the Mississippi River Delta".

We heard speakers from all over the world, saw all the exhibits, and met friends, new and old, and, of course, enjoyed the food! I represented our chapter by tacking up a poster featuring water quality data from Brays Bayou at Mason Park. I think it was well-received by those who stopped to talk. The 6th RAE Conference will be in Tampa, FL, 2012. Hopefully, Tampa won't be recovering from a hurricane. Otherwise, sounds great!



Book Study Group Report by Nelda Tuthill

Imagine making a vow to buy only food raised within 100 miles of your neighborhood, eating food from your own garden . . . or choosing to do without. That's what author Barbara Kingsolver, her husband and two daughters did during a yearlong experiment where they abandoned the



industrial-food pipeline to live a rural life. Kingsolver wrote about her family's experiences in the book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, which the Galveston Bay Area Master Naturalists Historical Perspectives Book Study Group finished in November.

Research has shown that we

consume about 400 gallons of oil a year, per citizen, for agriculture. A large part of that oil consumption is used to transport crops to market. Each food item in a typical U.S. meal has traveled an average of 1,500 miles.

According to the author's husband, Steven Hopp, an environmental studies professor: "If every U.S. citizen ate just one meal a week (any meal) composed of locally and organically raised meats and produce, we would reduce our country's oil consumption by over 1.1 million barrels of oil every week. Small changes in buying habits can make big differences. Becoming a less energy-dependent nation may just need to start with a good breakfast."

As the study group discusses each book, we ask ourselves the following questions:

- What is the book all about?
- How does the book relate to our work as Master Naturalists?
- How does the book challenge or inform me?

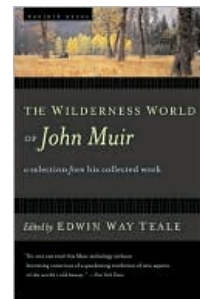
Animal, Vegetable, Miracle is a combination primer on industrial agri-business and the lives of plants and livestock. As Master Naturalists, the book helped the study group become aware of the source of our food and how transportation and production of our food affects the global environment.

In an effort to put this knowledge to work, we discussed how we will search out local farmers' markets, learn to store food, encourage more gardening, and teach others to garden - especially children. A friend once said: "Don't try to tell children about miracles, help them grow a garden."

In January 2011, the study group began reading *The Wilderness World of John Muir*, edited by Edwin Way Teale. During Muir's extraordinary life as a conservationist, he traveled through most of the American wilderness alone and on foot, without a gun or a sleeping bag. In 1903, while on a three-day camping

trip with President Theodore Roosevelt, Muir convinced Roosevelt of the importance of a national conservation program, and Muir is given major credit for saving the Grand Canyon and Arizona's Petrified Forest.

Muir's writing, based on journals he kept throughout his life, gives our generation a picture of an America still wild and unsettled only 100 years ago. In this book, Edwin Way Teale has collected the best of Muir's writings, selected from all his major works, including *My First Summer in the Sierra* and *Travels in Alaska*. *The Wilderness World of John Muir* provides "reading that is often magnificent, thrilling, exciting, breathtaking, and awe-inspiring," says Kirkus Reviews.



The Historical Perspective Book Study Group gives members opportunities to select, read and discuss books related to our natural world and the people that have tried to keep it natural. The group meets the first Monday of each month, from 10 a.m. to noon, at the Texas City Prairie Preserve. Two hours of Advanced Training are earned from each meeting. For information, contact Elsie Smith at 409-945-4731.

Texas Outdoor Family Program by Steve Upperman

During the past year, I've been involved in a great program that allows me to get out to many state parks and be involved with something I love: camping. That program is Texas Outdoor Family (TOF) and is run by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Being a Master Naturalist got me in the door, but I still had to show that I could add something as a TOF volunteer. I think of myself as a nature interpreter as well as a TOF staff helper.

The TPWD staff that works in the TOF program conducts workshops at state parks where families receive hands-on experience in basic outdoor skills. The overnight, weekend workshops are intended to introduce camping skills and other types of exciting outdoor recreation to participants of varying skill levels and backgrounds.

The program provides experienced staff and essential gear, such as stoves, lanterns, and tents. Families learn basic outdoor skills, such as how to build a base camp and cook on an open flame. Campers are required to bring sleeping bags or bedding, personal items, food and drinks.

What is especially great about TOF is the variety of Texas state parks. The program takes advantage of each park's unique resources and explores outdoor recreation, fishing, kayaking, Dutch-oven cooking, geocaching, and crafts. There is also a Junior Ranger certification program for children.



There are a lot of kids and family time; everyone has fun at Steven F. Austin SP.

The TOF program is not limited to nuclear families. As a result, the diversity of participants is amazing. Extended families, groups of friends, scout groups, and adults without children are welcome.

I have volunteered with several TOF programs throughout the state, and each staff adds its own style and personality to the weekend program. I have helped the staff with activities, the families with camping skills, and I have developed a few activities of my own. We often share food and equipment, and all I have to do is get to the state park. If the TOF program is a considerable distance away, I add a couple extra nights before and after the weekend to make the drive worthwhile.

On a typical weekend, I get to the state park on Friday before the TOF staff and check out the campsites. The TOF staff drives in with a trailer full of gear for the families. Early Saturday, we set out the gear, put up a few signs and check-in the families as they arrive. Adults first learn how to put up their tents and operate the camp stove, and the kids are off to a Junior Ranger activity at the same time. The families set up camp before lunch, with our help if needed. Afternoon activities vary with each state park but usually include geocaching and an interpretive event. Dinnertime offers variety as well, with everything from peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to five-course meals.



The families are learning how to set up their tents at Huntsville SP.

In the evening, we do a campfire demonstration, a night-sounds audio-visual program, and a night hike. Of course, I go around and visit the campsites as the official s'mores taster. Most of the little kids are fast asleep by 9 p.m., and the adults by 10 p.m. On Sunday morning, we break camp and I help get the gear back in good order. The families get a certificate and a pack of goodies before they leave, and they are encouraged to stay the day to enjoy the state park.

I have developed a few activities for the TOF program that I present in a nature-interpretive style. If we are at a state park with easy trails, we encourage the families to bring bikes. I lead day and night rides, especially at Brazos Bend State Park. During the winter months, the days are short, so we have more time for night hikes. I like to go without lights when there's a full moon.



Ranger David Heinicke is showing the kids a baby alligator at Brazos Bend SP.

I'm also a photography nut, so we ask the families to bring cameras. I lead a short demonstration on using their cameras and then support the families in taking photos for the TOF Facebook site.

As a TOF volunteer, I have been to most of the state parks in the Houston



area and as far away as Big Bend State Park. (Above) I'm looking forward to traveling to Palo Duro State Park and some of the Hill Country parks in the next year.



The families are getting instruction for kayaking before getting in the water at Galveston Island SP.

To learn more, log on to <http://beta-www.tpwd.state.tx.us/outdoor-learning/texas-outdoor-family/> or search for "Texas Outdoor Family" on Facebook to see comments and photos from participants.

Sandhill Cranes by Diane Humes

A dawn wind stirs on the great marsh. A single silence hangs from horizon to horizon. Out of some far recess of the sky a tinkling of little bells falls soft upon the listening land. Then a far clear blast of hunting horns, out of the sky into the fog. - Excerpted from A Sand County Almanac, Aldo Leopold

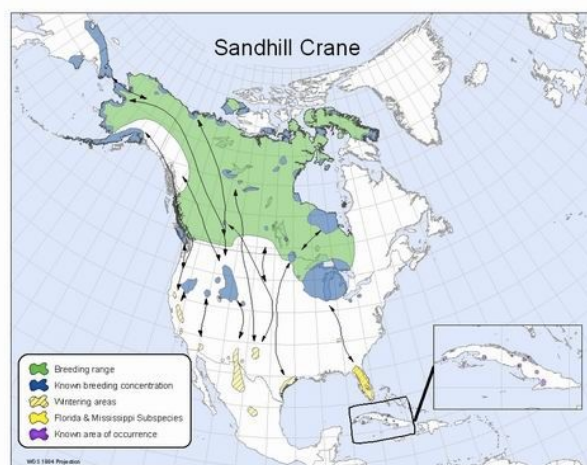


Sandhill Cranes, *Grus canadensis*, are birds of freshwater wetlands and shallow marshes, nesting, roosting, and feeding where the primary features are openness and standing water. These are large birds, standing 80cm to 1.2 m tall (3 - 5-ft), with wingspans of 5-6 ft, weighing ~3-6.5 kg, (6.5-14 lbs). Males may be slightly larger than females; otherwise plumages are identical - mostly gray with white cheek patches and red on heads. Feathers appear rusty-brown if they have been preening with iron-rich mud present in northern bogs, but return to gray after their fall molt. Cranes have long necks and legs, which are extended in flight. Their wing stroke pattern, with a snapping upstroke and slower down stroke, differentiates cranes from other long-legged, long-necked birds. Their calls are loud and rattling, "kar-r-r-o-o-o", which can be heard for a mile.

High horns, low horns, silence, and finally a pandemonium of trumpets, rattles, croaks, and cries that almost shakes the bog with its nearness, but without yet disclosing whence it comes. At last a glint of sun reveals the approach of a great echelon of birds. On motionless wing they emerge from the lifting mists, sweep a final arc of sky, and settle in clangorous descending spirals to their feeding grounds. A new day has begun on the crane marsh. - A.L.

Named for their migratory stopover habitat along the Platte River ("mile wide and an inch deep"), Sandhill

Cranes congregate in the spring in massive flocks in the Sand Hills of Nebraska, an eco-region of sand dunes created during the Ice Age, stabilized by 720 species of short-grass, mixed-grass, and tallgrass prairie wildflowers and grasses. This grassland, with thousands of lakes and ponds and the Platte River's shifting shallow channels and sandbars, sits on top of the Ogallala Aquifer; it is the largest and most intricate wetland ecosystem in the U.S. Most of the world's 650,000 Sandhill Cranes forage there for a month each spring before migrating north to wetlands in the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Canada. During the fall migration southward they may rest only a day in the Sand Hills.



Yearly since the ice age it has wakened each spring to the clangor of cranes. The peat layers that comprise the bog are laid down in the basin of an ancient lake. The cranes stand, as it were, upon the sodden pages of their own history. - A.L.

Sandhill Cranes live 25 years in the wild and may begin breeding at 2 to 7 years of age. They mate for life and are known for their unison and coordinated calling and dancing behaviors. Both parents share nest construction, incubation, and feeding duties, though the male is more in charge of defending the nest. Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan, and Canvasback ducks have been known to lay eggs in Sandhill Crane nests; Sandhills may also usurp nests of other Sandhills and Whooping Cranes. Nests are low mounds on the ground or on water, built of whatever dominant vegetation is available. The female lays two eggs each year; usually only one chick survives. Incubation lasts 29-32 days; the down-covered young can stand and walk almost immediately

and feed themselves within a day. Chicks fledge after 67-75 days and can fly with their parents within days. The family group remains together until the next year.

His tribe, we now know, stems out of the remote Eocene. The other members of the fauna in which he originated are long since entombed within the hills. When we hear his call we hear no mere bird. We hear the trumpet in the orchestra of evolution. - A.L.

Cranes of the world have an ancient lineage. The earliest fossils of the crane genus are from California and are 8-9 million years old. Sandhill Cranes, *Grus canadensis*, the most abundant of the world's cranes, and the Whooping Crane, *Grus americana*, reside in North America. Sandhill Crane fossils date from 2.5 million years ago in Florida, with Pleistocene fossils dating from 1.8 million years ago and prehistoric records common from Alaska to Mexico, and San Miguel Island, California to Florida, suggesting an extensive former range of crane populations.

And so they live and have their being- these cranes - not in the constricted present, but in the wider reaches of evolutionary time. Their annual return is the ticking of the geological clock. - A.L.

The American Ornithological Union recognizes six subspecies of Sandhill Crane:

Lesser Sandhill, *G.c. canadensis*
Greater Sandhill, *G.c. tabida*
Canadian Sandhill, *G.c. rowani*
Florida Sandhill, *G.c. pratensis*
Mississippi Sandhill, *G.c. pulla*
Cuban Sandhill, *G.c. nesiotis*

The first three, Lesser, Greater, and Canadian Sandhill Cranes are migratory, nesting in the northern U.S. and Canada to eastern Siberia, with wintering grounds in the southern U.S. and northern Mexico. Migratory crane populations are expanding, even where hunted. Florida, Mississippi, and Cuban Sandhill Cranes do not migrate; Cuban and Mississippi Sandhill Cranes are endangered; the Florida Sandhill Cranes are doing well.

Cranes are diurnal or daytime migrants, and like raptors, use thermals to rise to up to 3,600. Migrating flocks fly in V formation and travel an average of about 250 km per day at speeds of 23 to 83 km/h. They may fly 1-10 hours each day and roost in a wetland for the night.

The ultimate value in these marshes is wildness, and the crane is wildness incarnate. But all conservation of wildness is self-defeating, for to cherish we must see

and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is no wilderness left to cherish. - A.L.

Sandhill Cranes are omnivorous, feeding on plants, small vertebrates, and invertebrates. Before agriculture, cranes consumed starchy tubers of nutsedge and other aquatic plants, but now readily forage for grains. A large flock can do severe damage to a newly-planted corn crop; the International Crane Foundation is experimenting with seed treated with a deterrent that cranes seem to avoid, in order to promote peaceful co-existence with farmers. Cranes also clean out a lot of waste grain left in a field from the fall harvest.

Sandhill Cranes of all three migratory subspecies might winter along the Gulf Coast of Texas, roosting on shallow freshwater marshes, spending the day in coastal prairie, scrub oak brushland, freshwater marshes, and sorghum stubble fields. They learn their favored sites and become perennially faithful to them and depend on them for survival. The biggest threats to Sandhill Crane survival are loss and degradation of wetlands on the wintering grounds and migration stops. What will they do if all the sites are gone? What will we do?

Some day ... perhaps in the fullness of geological time, the last crane will trumpet his farewell and spiral skyward from the great marsh. High out of the clouds will fall the sound of hunting horns, the baying of the phantom pack, the tinkle of little bells, and then a silence never to be broken, unless perchance in some far pasture of the Milky Way. - A.L.



This housing development in League City was once a Sandhill Crane winter roosting area.

Incredible Creek Encounter by Donna Schnitker

One can never tell what wonders of nature he may observe if he simply slows his pace and opens himself to whatever mother nature has to offer in that moment. Such an unexpected and once in a lifetime experience happened to me during a recent paddle down Clear Creek from the Polly Ranch Park in Friendswood to the Challenger Seven Memorial Park.

Early morning is a favorite time for me to take a leisurely paddle as the birds are more plentiful, small mammals are scurrying along the banks, and the temperatures are more comfortable. Depending upon how much sightseeing I do, the round trip takes about 3 hours, and I've gotten into the routine of stopping at the old boat ramp at Challenger Park for a brief rest and snacks. It was during one such break that I had a front row seat to observe what really goes on beneath the placid waters of the creek.

As I sat dangling my feet from the end of the weathered, wooden dock, numerous fish were jumping, attempting to catch the insects that were darting through the air. Just as one counts how many times a flat rock will skip along the surface of the water, I found myself counting the leaps of various fish, and was quite impressed with one fish's total of 5 superlative leaps. However, soon after, it was the 6 inch bass leaping toward the dock that caught my attention.

When this energetic, silver fish dropped back into the water from its third leap, a long, assertive snake confidently glided to the surface and caught the fish side ways in its mouth! This feat took place about 2 feet from the dock, and I found myself shocked but mesmerized.

Now snakes are not my preferred companions, and I'd rather they slither away from my locale. However, this 4 foot long reptile had a mission, and that was to get this fish to shore so he could have a hearty meal. As my kayak was beached on the boat ramp directly in front of the snake, I quickly pulled myself up, ran down the dock, and pulled my kayak further ashore. Trying to coax the snake away from my kayak, I grabbed my paddle and pounded the ground. The snake did veer a few feet away, but settled along the waterline, with head and fish raised in the air.



Standing a safe distance away, as my skill in identifying snakes is rather weak and my toes were still curled, I watched the snake as he patiently waited for the fish to calm down. After fifteen minutes passed, he maneuvered the fish head first into its enlarged mouth and began to swallow the fish. His muscles contracted as the fish made its way through the snake's elongated body. Then, with a quick glance in my direction, the snake turned toward the open water and swam away.

Unfortunately, it wasn't until the snake started to swallow the fish that I realized I could capture a few photos with my cell phone. I've shared my photos with a few naturalists, and several have expressed a concern that this snake may be an invasive species. Florida already is battling pythons and anacondas. Could my personal encounter have been with such an intruder? Either way, it's hard to believe that I witnessed a snake consume its meal from capture to last swallow! Editors Note: One expert guessed that this is a non poisonous, banded or diamondback water snake.

"Therefore am I still a lover of the meadows and the woods, and mountains; and of all that we behold from this green earth; of all the mighty world of eye and ear, both what they half-create, and what perceive; well pleased to recognize in nature and the language of the sense, the anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, the guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul of all my moral being."

From *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*
by William Wordsworth

GBAC-TMN at CAST 2010 - Houston by Nathan Veatch

Our chapter had a unique opportunity to contribute at the Conference for the Advancement of Science Teaching (CAST) in Houston last fall. 7,000 Science teachers from Texas and surrounding states attended the conference, making it the largest state science teachers' conference in the United States.

On Thursday, November 11th our chapter hosted a full day fieldtrip entitled "**Galveston Island State Park - A Learning Laboratory.**" Thirty-six teachers visited the park and observed the habitats and organisms of the bay, beach, and prairie habitats.

Bill and Jaime Ashby, Frank Budny and Emmeline Dodd worked with each group as they visited the beach. The teachers collected shells, sifted for organisms at the waters' edge, and examined the fish in the seine.



Next the teachers rotated to the Nature Center where Dick Benoit, assisted by Ellen Gerloff, introduced them to common grasses of the coastal prairie. Dick also demonstrated how to make seed balls and plant presses that they could use with their students.



The groups then visited Nathan Veatch and Mel Measeles on the bay-shore to sharpen their field skills by observing the life style of the fiddler crab and the

marsh periwinkle. Then the teachers were instructed in the use of the minnow seine and practiced collecting many small fish, shrimp and crabs that were observed in half-moon aquariums. These aquariums and sieves were donated to the park by our chapter.



The teachers received a shell collection, an AT workshop shell reference and other door prizes supplied by our chapter. Thanks to Jaime Ashby for assembling the shells in the collections and to Ellen Hufft, GISP shell librarian.

All the above Master Naturalists routinely lead guided nature tours at the park for schools and the public and are also members of the Friends of Galveston Island State Park.

On Friday, November 12th Master Naturalists hosted a short course: "Have Fun with Squid and Fish in Your Classroom!" Julie Massey, Nathan Veatch, Dick Benoit's granddaughter, Stanzie Seshier, and Lamar Consolidated teachers presented this repeat of last year's popular workshop that included dissections of squid and fish and an opportunity for participants to learn how to fish print.



The Friends of Galveston Island State Park and the Texas Marine Education Association appreciate all the support that the chapter has given to the fieldtrips, workshops, and short course at this CAST conference

and at Galveston Island State Park over the past two years.

National Ocean Sciences Bowl Needs YOU!! by Julie Massey

“Fishes that spend most of their lives in freshwater but migrate to saltwater are referred to as . . . ? What island forms the eastern shore of Baffin Bay? The Marine Mammal Protection Act was enacted in what year?” Can you hear the clock ticking as you try to answer these questions? Let’s put a buzzer in your hand and face you off with a team of enthusiastic, determined high school students! Whew! The pressure is on! Welcome to the fast paced, fun, exciting world of National Ocean Sciences Bowl!

The National Ocean Sciences Bowl (NOSB) is a nationally recognized and highly acclaimed high school academic competition that provides a forum for students to test their knowledge of the marine sciences including biology, chemistry, geography, physics, geology, social sciences and technology.

Texas Sea Grant sponsors the Regional Ocean Science Bowl Competitions in Texas. *The Loggerhead Challenge* is the South Texas regional competition and will be held at Texas A&M Corpus Christi on Feb. 6, 2011. *The Dolphin Challenge* is the northern regional competition and will be held at Texas A&M in College Station on Feb. 26, 2011. Galveston will host the National Competition on April 29- May 1, 2011!

Volunteers are needed to make these competitions happen! Training is provided! Volunteers are needed in every competition room for each round! Roles include:

Moderator: essentially in charge of the round; must be able to read aloud clearly and quickly and keep the competition running smoothly; those with a background in the marine sciences are preferred for pronunciation of scientific terms.

Rules Judge: must know all the Competition Rules; ensures quiet during the game and that the rules are consistently and correctly followed by everyone in the room.

Science Judge: must have a technical background (generally a graduate degree) in marine sciences and be prepared to address challenges to

content by participating students.

Timekeeper: must know the rules that apply, know how to work a stopwatch and digital clock, and stay focused on time, not the game.

Scorekeeper: must know the rules that apply and be able to do simple arithmetic (addition and subtraction) quickly and accurately.

Runner: must be able to move quickly between the competition room and the Judges’ Room or Ocean Bowl Central.

If you would like to participate in NOSB or have questions, please contact Julie at 281-309-5063 or jmassey@ag.tamu.edu!

Come join us and be “wowed” by students from across the state and nation!

Each team consists of four students and their coach, and may include a fifth student to serve as an alternate. Teams compete in the regional competition. The winning team advances to the two-day national competition. Galveston will host the National Competition in 2011!

For more information on NOSB, *the Loggerhead Challenge* and *Dolphin Challenge*, please visit the Texas Sea Grant website at <http://dolphinschallenge.tamu.edu/index.html>.

Created in 1998 in honor of the International Year of the Ocean, the NOSB competition has grown to include 300 schools and over 2,000 students participating annually.

The NOSB mission is to enrich science teaching and learning across the United States through a high-profile national competition that increases high school students' knowledge of the oceans and enhances public understanding and stewardship of the oceans.

Guppies from Julie

Red Tide Rangers

Texas Red Tide Rangers - "I want to be a Red Tide Ranger!" was the motto of the 11 Galveston Bay Area Master Naturalists who participated in Red Tide Ranger training in December! Tony



Reisinger (below left), Cameron County Coastal and Marine Resource Agent, came up the coast to train the volunteers on monitoring for red tide and the environmental and economic impacts red tide has on marine ecosystems.

Congratulate the new Red Tide Rangers when you see them sporting their Red Tide Ranger caps!



Brazoria County Dune Restoration!

Ten Galveston Bay Area Master Naturalist volunteers joined Boy Scouts and school groups to plant 11,000 dune plants at Surfside on a sunny Saturday in December! The volunteers planted approximately .5 miles of dunes as a part of this project! The project was coordinated by the Brazoria County Parks Department. Plantings are also scheduled for early 2011!



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Texas AgriLife Extension Service programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Court of Texas cooperating.

The Midden

This newsletter is published by **Galveston Bay Area Chapter - Texas Master Naturalists.**

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The Midden Deadline For the April Issue

March 7

If you have Advanced Training or Volunteer Opportunities, please submit information to Diane Humes treimanhumes@earthlink.net

