



Chapter News

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A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT MIKE



Ahhhhh February — the gateway to spring. Just think, last month I was hunting the North Pole gatekeeper and now we have 80°. Yes southeast Texas weather at its best.

My Goldfinches have pretty much left. Last week on my Project Feederwatch report I had 80+ and the last two days a mere ten.

Speaking of Project Feederwatch, it's one of the many citizen science projects for which you may claim volunteer hours (maximum two hours/week). Our recently-departed member Ramah O'Gorman was an active participant. Check out the article she wrote back in 2012:

<http://tmn-cot.org/s/pfw.pdf>

The volunteer time is actually the cherry on the sundae.

I have not seen anything unusual or rare yet (there is always hope) but it is fascinating just watching the interactions of the different species of birds that came to the feeders. When they came, what weather conditions, what other species present, what food was available.

I signed my Dad up for FeederWatch this year for his 87th birthday (and one of my younger brothers for his 58th). Dad has a couple of feeders in his backyard and we have always talked about what he had seen. Now I go over on his reporting days and we watch and talk about the different ones he has seen.

We as a group and as part of our mission search for ways to introduce others be they young or mature to the outdoors and the wonders of nature. This, as well as other citizen science projects like Monarch Watch, offer excellent opportunities to be involved with our children/grandchildren (maybe students) in discovering the outdoors.

The list of citizen science projects is huge. The thing to remember is for each project there is a need for the information and a *reason* for the project. Therein lies the fascination for the Master Naturalist. What is the *reason* and what can I do to help? Is it education, habitat, observing, building, all of the above?

Before joining the Cradle of Texas Chapter I knew a few of the basic birds. But through trips and discussions with many of you, I have expanded to know at least a few more of the basic birds. Yep, birding is a lifelong trip. I stand in awe of the members who have been doing it for up to 35 years or more. Something sparked their interest long ago that led to a lifelong interest. Could you be the one that gives that spark to someone? Give it a try. —Mike

Mike Mullins is the President of the Cradle of Texas Chapter. He can be reached at mcmprm@embarqmail.com

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The Texas Master Naturalist program is coordinated by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Texas Master Naturalist programs serve all people without regard to socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.



The 2014 Migration Celebration Adspot was created by TMN-COT member Denis Mudderman. It is displayed on three websites:

- Cradle of Texas Chapter <http://tmn-cot.org/>
- Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges <http://refugefriends.org/>
- Friends of Balcones Canyonlands NWR <http://friendsofbalcones.org/>

**Texas Master Naturalist Program
Cradle of Texas Chapter
General Meeting and Advanced Training
Wednesday, March 12, 2014
AgriLife Building, Angleton**



8:30 AM - 9:00 AM	Fun and Fellowship Refreshment Team: Jim Hillis, Barbara Bruyere, Julia Geisler, Joanna Harlan, Joan Simonsen
9:00 AM - 9:50 AM	General Meeting <i>This meeting is approved for 1.00 hour Volunteer Time.</i>
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM	Program: Focus on Columbia Bottomlands Speaker: Michael Lange, Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service <i>This training is approved for Advanced Training. The number of approved hours will be announced at the meeting and will be available after the meeting at</i> http://tmn-cot.org/Advanced/index.html

Michael Lange is a Wildlife Biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex. His major interest and responsibility is the coordination of land conservation efforts in the Columbia Bottomlands and associated prairies and coastal wetlands.



The Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex has approval to acquire up to 70,000 acres of bottomland hardwoods and associated wetland to be added to the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge in accordance with a master plan known as the *Austin's Woods Conservation Plan*. This plan "authorizes the acquisition of fee and easement interests of 70,000 acres from willing sellers and donors in Brazoria, Fort Bend, Matagorda and Wharton Counties, Texas."

As the map at the left indicates, this is an area between State Highway 59 and the Gulf Coast. These lands consist of

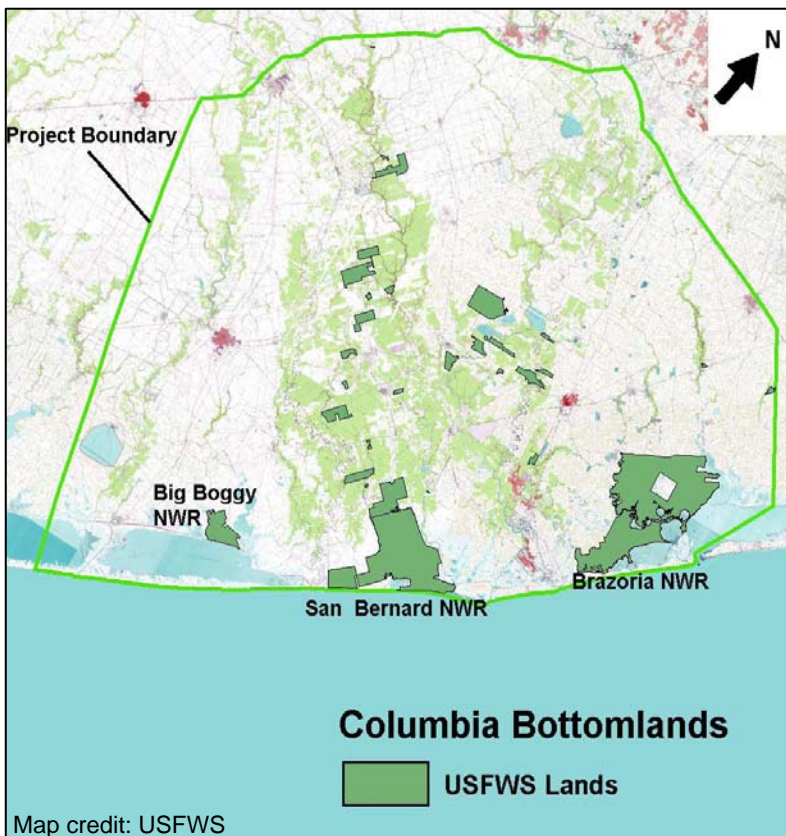
bottomland hardwood forest and other wetland habitats collectively known as the Columbia Bottomlands. These forests and wetlands are found in the floodplains of the major rivers and streams including the Brazos, Colorado, and San Bernard Rivers and their tributaries.

Mike plays an important role in this effort. He evaluates habitat and land for conservation efforts and identifies priority tracts for potential acquisition. He also coordinates the land acquisition steps and works with the Service realty division and numerous partner organizations to acquire important habitat or to help other conservation organizations acquire the land. Mike works to secure funding through government programs and private grant sources.

In his talk today, Mike will discuss the overall ecology of the Bottomlands and discuss the progress and ongoing efforts to conserve this very unique and important ecosystem.

Map source: *Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment*. Brazoria: Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex, p. I-9 (PDF page 550/579).

<http://tinyurl.com/Draft-CCP>



Meet the Intern Class of 2014

By Roy Morgan, Training Director

If 20 interns in a class is good then 22 interns will be even better. We now have 22 individuals wanting to join the ranks of Master Naturalists. This is going to be an awesome group. The class projects have been identified and the groups are already at work on their respective projects.

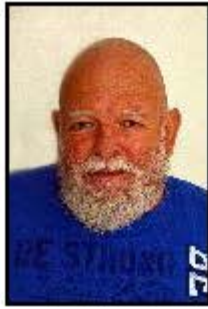
Be sure to meet and greet our new interns at the March meeting.

The projects are:

- “Anatomy of a River” (A San Bernard Project).
- “The Live Oak Bayou Unit” (a recently acquired property of the USFWS).
- “An Urban Prairie” (a small prairie in the northern part of the county).
- “The Bluebirds of Brazoria County” (construction, locating and documenting of bluebird houses at a couple of locations).



Denice Apgar



Lou Golish



John Minkert



Mel McKey



Lorna Witt



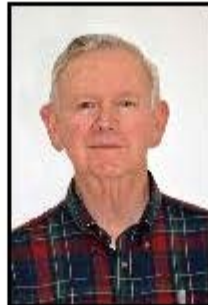
Cindy Goodrum



Dawn Logan



Gretchen Minor



David Plunkett



Christina Hartman



Larry Kirby



Hope Cepak



Kim Richardson



Ken Sluis



Linda Sluis



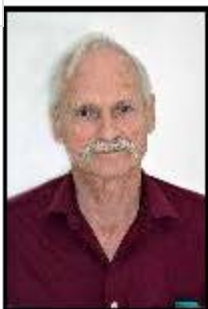
Michelle Hague



Sherri Wilson



Breana Kitchen



Garry Ellis



Janet Jackson-Ellis



Joycelynn Grigson



Sheree Muzny

For intern bios see Attachment.
<http://tmn-cot.org/s/aib.pdf>

Photos by Richard Schaffhausen and Neal McLain.



Migration Celebration

Migration Celebration is an annual spring nature festival presented each spring by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges. Many Cradle of Texas Chapter members participate in the planning and execution of the celebration.



This year, Migration Celebration kicks off with a fundraising dinner at Freeport RiverPlace on April 4, followed by a two days of events at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge on April 12-13.

March 7 - Photo Contest submission deadline

<http://www.migrationcelebration.org/PhotoContest/>

April 4 - Kickoff Dinner – RiverPlace

http://refugefriends.org/Press/MC14_Kickoff_Speaker_Flier.pdf

April 12-13 Main Events – San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge

<http://refugefriends.org/Press/MC-Flier-2014.pdf>

Volunteers are needed, and participation is approved for Volunteer Hours. This is a good opportunity to rack up some volunteer hours toward certification or recertification!

Volunteer positions are available for a wide variety of interests — everything from assistant cook to parking attendant and tour guide to information booth host. If you'd like to volunteer, contact Ed Barrios, Volunteer Coordinator:

Home: 979-297-1815

Cell: 979-415-4998

Email: ed77566@comcast.net



“Fly Catcher” Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) Photo: Tim Timmis
2012 Photo Contest Best of Show

Photo Gallery Monthly Highlights

Duck, Duck, Goose!!!

The ponds and marshes of the Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuges and Brazos Bend State Park are teeming with ducks and geese this winter. Whether in flocks, pairs or alone, they present a colorful picture of the waterfowl present in the county.

Below are some of the species of wintering ducks and geese seen at Brazoria NWR (BNWR) and San Bernard NWR (SBNWR).

Top Left: Northern Shovelers are easily identified by their long spatulate bill. These blue-winged ducks are frequently seen tilted bottoms-up as they filter mud with their bills. (Photo P. Romfh, BNWR)

Top Center: Greater White-fronted Geese are nicknamed “Speckle-bellies.” Their 28” size, white frontal feathering, and orange legs make them a stand-out in the marsh. (Photo P. Romfh, SBNWR)

Top Right: Gadwalls are large dabbling ducks with round heads and thin bills. They pick food from the surface of shallow ponds and marshes. (Photo P. Romfh, BNWR)

Center Left: American Wigeons are dabbling ducks that pick food from the surface like the gadwalls. At a distance, they have a bald look with their white and greenish crowns. (Photo P. Romfh, BNWR)

Center Right: Snow Geese, both the white and dark forms, are often seen in flocks. Their loud ‘*whouk, whouk*’ calls resonate across fields and marshes as they group and re-group. (Photo J. Eppner, BNWR)

Bottom Left: Ruddy Ducks are small ducks with long, spiky tails that are often raised. (Photo P. Romfh, BNWR)

Bottom Center: Ring-necked Ducks, diving ducks that are characterized by a distinctive white outline on the bill, are often found on sheltered ponds. (Photo P. Romfh, SBNWR)

Bottom Right: Northern Pintails are large dabbling ducks that seem to be wearing long white bibs tied around their necks. (Photo P. Romfh, BNWR)



Hint: Binoculars or a camera with a long lens are a must to view ducks and geese that are swimming and foraging on the far sides of ponds and marshes.

Volunteers Needed for Quintana Spring Fling

By Cecilia Riley, Executive Director, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory

Every April, thousands of migratory songbirds arrive along the Texas coast. And every year, hordes of local and out-of-town birders descend up the bird sanctuaries at Quintana to witness the migration. There are few services for visitors in the vicinity, so GCBO has established the "Quintana Spring Fling." During the month of April, GCBO staff and volunteers are stationed at the Host Station next to Quintana City Hall.

We need volunteers to assist with Spring Fling! Volunteers perform several important duties:

- Serve as hosts for visitors, provide information about the sanctuary, and help novice birders identify birds.
- Periodically walk through sanctuary, listing birds seen, and maintain a daily log of birds.
- Update the "birds seen" board near the sanctuary entrance.
- Assist with the operation of a small gift shop located at our Spring Fling Station, selling snacks, water, soft drinks, and some nature store items.

The Spring Fling Station is located just across the street from the Neotropical Bird Sanctuary (see map) It is operated seven days a week, from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, throughout the month of April. Volunteers are assigned in four-hour shifts (9:00 -1:00 and 1:00 - 4:00). Volunteers may choose to work a full day, or work single shifts on multiple dates throughout the month.

Volunteers are urged to attend a training session at the Spring Fling Station on Friday March 21st at 3:00 pm at Quintana Host Station. The training session will include an explanation of the duties, and the location of location of keys and supplies.

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GCBO is a partner of the Cradle of Texas Chapter. Volunteer hours count toward certification or recertification. If you are interested volunteering, please contact GCBO Office Manager Alice Roemer at aroemer@gcbo.org or 979-480-0999

GCBO is an independent non-profit organization. It is recognized as an innovative organization, which has designed and conducted a significant number of large conservation projects, including migration studies, habitat enhancement, land acquisition, and regional habitat mapping. For further information, see the GCBO website at <http://gcbo.org/>

TMN-COT MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE

Quintana Spring Fling is approved for Volunteer time. You may claim:

- All hours spent at the Spring Fling Station.
- Travel time for each round trip to the station. Travel time is limited to your actual daily travel time or the amount of time that you spend at the station *on that same day*.

Please code your timesheet "GCBO."



Spring Fling Host Station

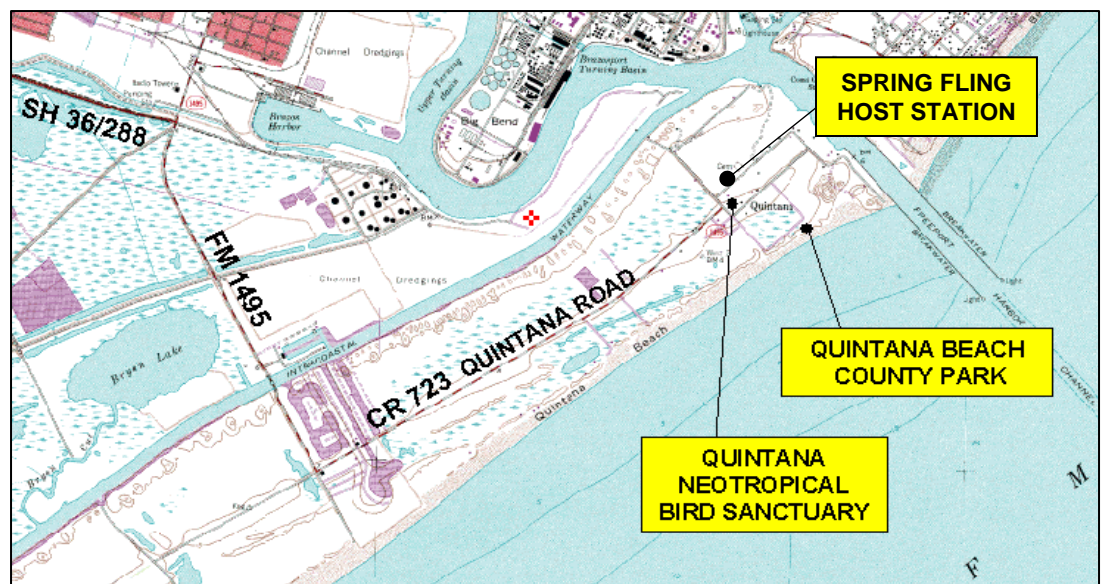
Location:

Quintana City Hall
814 Lamar St.
Freeport TX 77541
979-233-0848

Directly across the street from
Quintana Neotropical Bird
Sanctuary.

Google map:

<http://goo.gl/maps/g7IMh>



Boots on the Ground and Shovels in the Dirt! Eagle Nest Unit South Prairie Restoration

By Peggy Romfh, TMN-COT volunteer

Recipe for prairie restoration: Take a team of Master Naturalists with shovels in hand to dig up clumps of little bluestem from forested refuge area. Add muscle power and elbow grease to dig and carry clumps to trailer. Drive to South Prairie unit. Dig holes across the prairie. Transplant little bluestem clumps into holes and fill in with dirt.

This one day restoration work project occurred on February 22. The naturalist team transplanted over 200 little bluestem clumps!

Per USFWS botanist Thomas Adams, the prairie restoration includes use of a prescribed burn every three years to get rid of non-native grasses currently growing on the prairie, spreading of large prairie hay bales harvested from Nash Prairie Preserve (to propagate native prairie plants and wildflowers), eradication of Macartney roses growing along the fence line and into the prairie, and transplantation of little blue stem to encourage growth of native grasses.

Prairie restoration may take up to 20 years. The USFWS Refuge staff is hoping that the Master Naturalists will assist again next year to transplant additional little bluestem at the prairie site.

Below L-R: Mike Mullins, David Plunkett, Sheree Muzny, Chris Kneupper, Jerry Krampota, Sherri Wilson, Thomas Adams (USFWS), Breana Kitchen, Peggy Romfh, Roy Morgan, Roland Davis (USFWS). Not shown: Pete Romfh and Denice Apgar.

Photos: Pete Romfh



Please Don't Murder Myrtle — Crape Myrtle, That Is!

By Barbara H. Burkhardt
Texas Master Gardener, Brazoria County
Texas Master Naturalist, Cradle of Texas Chapter

It's that time of year. Plants that are dormant in the winter should be pruned: (1) to maintain or reduce plant size, (2) to remove undesirable growth, (3) to stimulate flowering and fruiting, (4) to shape plants in an artificial form, (5) to prevent damage to life and property and (6) restore a youthful, natural growth habit in certain overgrown shrubs. We all know that proper pruning techniques are very important. This is especially true for one of the southern gardener's favorite plants, the crape myrtle.

Several years ago, *Southern Living* magazine published an article on the proper way to prune crape myrtle. It has been followed by other articles describing "crape murder". These articles were written to educate the public about the correct way to prune crape myrtles. Judging from what I observe, during my walks and drives around the area, many folks have missed reading the articles and continue to "murder" myrtle.

For years, the proper technique was considered to be "topping". This is the horrible technique that removes all growth above a certain height and leaves large "knuckles" where branching had occurred.

This type of severe pruning results in (1) a shorter bloom time, (2) delayed flowering, (3) weaker branching, and (4) increased insect and disease problems. This technique went out of use by arborist and educated gardeners years ago. Now we understand that no branches, smaller in diameter than a #2 pencil (0.25 inches), should be completely removed.

This type of incorrect pruning is often called "Crape Murder".

Like all trees, the correct way to prune a crape myrtle involves enhancing its natural form rather than trying to force it to grow in a space that is too small or force it to an artificial shape. Crape myrtles naturally grow as small upright or vase shaped trees with multiple trunks. They are grown not only for their beautiful blooms, but also for the interesting color and texture of the bark, especially in winter. In a well-pruned crape myrtle, the trunks grow upward and outward, with branches fanning out rather than growing inward into the center of the tree.

Exact pruning technique can be found on numerous websites. All you have to do is Google "crape myrtle pruning" to learn what equipment is needed and everything you ever wanted to know about pruning techniques.

So, if you are considering pruning your crape myrtles, please take a few minutes and educate yourself on the proper technique. Hopefully, you will contribute to my cause and stop murdering Myrtle—crape myrtle, that is!



This type of incorrect pruning is often called "Crape Murder".



New growth emerges from the lopped-off trunks of a murdered Crape Myrtle.



Murdered Crape Myrtles

Photo: Clemson University Extension

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Website	http://tmn-cot.org
Facebook	http://facebook.com/TMN.COT
Email Listserv	See details below



MASTER NATURALIST EMAIL LISTS

TMN-COT Chapter list

- Instructions http://tmn-cot.org/Email_Lists/index.html
- Send messages to TMN-COT@googlegroups.com
- Message Archive <http://tinyurl.com/TMN-COT-Mail>
- All messages are sent immediately.

State Master Naturalist list

- Instructions <http://txmn.org/staying-connected/sign-up-for-tmn-listserv/>
- Subscribe listserv@listserv.tamu.edu
- All messages are held for moderation by the TMN State Coordinator

Chapter News is published monthly on the first day of the month by the Texas Master Naturalist Cradle of Texas Chapter. Submissions are welcome. Submission deadline is 5:00 PM the last day of the month. Submissions should be sent by email to *Chapter News* Editor at tmn.cot@gmail.com. Submissions may be edited for clarity, grammar, spelling, and space requirements. Photos are welcome. Please send photos as JPEG files