

Mid-Coast Chapter

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™Member
News

June 2018

Why We Use the Dragonfly as Our Symbol And the Symbolism Behind It

According to the TMN state website (see [TMN Logo History](#)), our dragonfly is the Cyrano Darner (*Nasiaeschna pentacantha*), and it was chosen because it has the classic dragonfly shape and has beautiful coloration, especially in the male. Our early TMN marketers wanted the logo to be an actual species' digital image and not just a pretty drawing. They turned to Forrest Mitchell's Digital Dragonfly Museum for help.

The museum's specimens are captured and refrigerated to make them dormant. Then, they are scanned using a flatbed scanner and a mouse pad with a hole cut in it to keep from crushing the specimen. The scanning process rewarms the specimen and after scanning, it is released unharmed.

Throughout the world, the dragonfly symbolizes wisdom, change, transformation, light, and adaptability in life. The dragonfly is considered the symbol of transformation because it is born in the water and begins to grow there, but then it moves into the air and learns to fly. Dragonflies also have flight patterns that enable them to change their direction of flight quickly and easily.

Our Chapter is experiencing many changes this year, perhaps due to the devastation of Hurricane Harvey and how it changed people's lives, causing them to reevaluate their locale and priorities in life. As some members are leaving to pursue other dreams, others are stepping into their roles and making positive changes. Like the dragonfly, let's hope our members adapt to these changes and emerge from the dark waters into the light. Speaking of light, Beth Hudson contributed this cartoon in collaboration with her son. I hope she will continue to lighten our spirits with more in future issues.

Editor, Pat Garland



You know you're a naturalist when you plan your honeymoon near a migratory flyway. ~ M. Hudson

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Horned Lizard fitted with transmitter to track its movements. [Page 2](#)

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Phil Stapleton photographed Whistling Ducks at Jones Lake. [Page 4](#)

Where Have All the Horny Toads Gone?

As a child, I remember catching “horny toads” with my brother in our backyard in Austin. We would gently turn the toads over in our hands and rub their little bellies until they relaxed and fell asleep. I’m sure many of you have similar memories and have often wondered what happened to the “horny toads”. The preferred common name is Texas Horned Lizard, although they are often also called Horny Frogs. The scientific name is *Phrynosoma* and they are lizards, although probably earned the misnomer of toad because of their round body.

In 1967 the Texas Legislature protected horned lizards because they knew they don't do well in captivity, and then in 1977 they were put on the Threatened and Endangered Species list in Texas. Many scientists blame pesticides for their demise because these pesticides kill harvester ants, a favorite food. Some people feel that the decline was due to the imported fire ant, but biologists believe that horned lizards were already experiencing population declines well before the fire ants took hold.

Ashley Wall, a graduate student at Texas Christian University, found that the lizards in her study area in Kennedy, TX stayed in relatively small home ranges. The average range size was about 0.8 of an acre. She found this out by putting small transmitters on the Horned Lizards and then radio-tracking their whereabouts. The Horned Lizards tracked did not like to cross the roads. After a few generations, the genetic diversity within the inbred populations was greatly reduced and their numbers declined.

One place that Texas Horned Lizards have survived is on the 706-acre Barnhart Ranch in Berclair owned by Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalists Claire Barnhart and Wilfred Korth. The ranch is a natural wildlife habitat and the couple was awarded the Lone Star Land Steward award for their wildlife management efforts on the ranch. Claire

stated, “In the summer of 1995, it was 100 degrees outside and I recorded my first sighting of a Horned Lizard on the ranch in my logbook. By 2000, I had sighted 14. I continue to log sightings of these lizards in iNaturalist, along with other flora, animals, birds, and insects.”

Claire said the best place to look for Horned Lizards is along the fence line where the brush thickens, usually near a fence post, and within 100 feet of red ant beds. The Horned Lizards are camouflaged and difficult to see, but she looks for the tracks, made distinct by the swishing of their stubby tails, as they run. She also looks for nests, which are innocuous clumps of grass, often open on one side where the Horned Lizards enter and exit. The lizards burrow under the grass into the cooler sand underneath and will rest or lay eggs. Often, they will also take shelter in cactus patches.

Another way to find the Horned Lizards is to look for droppings, which are about an inch long with a little white ball of uric acid on one end. The droppings or scat will be found on open ground. Partially decomposed scat will show bits of ant exoskeletons in it. Horned Lizard scat in the right habitat is a sure sign there are Horned Lizards around. A few years ago, the Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalists had an AT session at the ranch and went out to look for Horned Lizards and their scat.

According to Claire, the Horned Lizards are at the bottom of the food chain and fall prey to cats, birds, raccoons, coyotes, and most other common predators. They protect themselves by puffing up, so their scales stand out and, sometimes they shoot a red, blood-like substance from their eyes. She believes this substance tastes bad and helps protect them.



HORNED LIZARDS AT BARNHART RANCH



Wilfred Korth with horned lizard



Baby horned lizard

If you want to see the Horned Lizards for yourself, visit the Barnhart Q5 Ranch, just north of Berclair, TX

There are 3 cottages for rent and more than 14 miles of manicured trails, fish ponds, a stargazer platform, and firepit. Claire or Wilfred would love to enhance your visit by showing you around and telling you about the best opportunities to enjoy nature on the ranch and see wildlife. For more information:

www.barnhartranchretreat.com
8212 Fm 883,, Berclair, TX 78107
(361) 542-0348

Getting to Know Some of Our New Members

On June 2, our 2018 class graduated and received certificates at the congratulatory potluck luncheon held for them. They are a fascinating group. Read about a few of them:

Julie Hejducek



Julie retired from the Finance Department at Shell Oil. She lives in Needville, Texas and has a second home in Rockport on the Lamar Peninsula. She did a lot of volunteer work in Needville, but after Hurricane Harvey, she wanted to devote her volunteer efforts to doing something positive for nature in our coastal region. Julie read about the Mid-Coast Chapter's recruitment efforts in Nextdoor Lamar, a neighborhood social media group, and decided to sign up for training to become a Texas Master Naturalist.

Her hobbies are working out, running, walking outdoors and biking. Although quiet and somewhat reserved, Julie loves new adventures such as skydiving and scuba diving. Her future dream is to hike the Grand Canyon. She plans to volunteer doing bird counts, working at Mad Island, working with birds at Welder, and monitoring the Whooping Cranes. She loves being outside and has enjoyed meeting so many people with interests like hers.



Robert and Sharon Snider



Rob and Sharon started working together in Austin, TX at the IBM Campus. Sharon continues to work for IBM Research from her home office in Seadrift, TX as an accessibility software engineer working with teams across IBM to develop accessible applications that everyone can use, including the aging population and persons with special needs. She has a Bachelor's degree in Computer Information Systems and a Master's degree in Psychology.

Rob retired from IBM in November of 2017 and is now a U.S. Coast Guard-licensed master captain and President of [Spirit-Bay Empowering Adventures, Inc.](#) A non-profit organization that provides people with special needs the opportunity to enjoy educational outdoor adventures, such as educational wildlife tours, guided fishing trips, and hunting trips free of charge. Robert also has been involved in the Wounded Warriors program, taking wounded veterans out fishing in his boat.

One unique talent Sharon was willing to share is her ability to card and spin wool from sheep she raised on her 20-acre mini-ranch in California. She uses the homespun wool to create crocheted items for winter wear. When Robert and Sharon moved to Texas they adopted a capuchin monkey that was part of their family for over 20 years.

In their spare time, Sharon and Robert both love to fish, photograph wildlife, and go camping. They learned about the Texas Master Naturalists while searching for information on the Internet for native and edible plants a couple of years ago. They both really enjoyed the initial training and its wealth of information, as well as the abundance of volunteer opportunities.

Rob and Sharon have also enjoyed volunteering for Audubon Tern projects and monitoring the Chester Island rookery as well as entering wildlife photos in iNaturalist. Next year they plan to get more involved with the International Crane Foundation and assist Texas Parks and Wildlife with abandon crab trap removal in Calhoun County.

Phoebe Wilson and Jane Moore



(Phoebe shown here. Jane was out of town)

Phoebe used to be a CPA in Santa Fe, N.M. After retiring to Rockport, she volunteered her skills at many organizations over the years, such as the Aransas County History Center and AARP. Phoebe recruited her sister, Jane to join the program with her. Jane was in the legal department at the University of Texas in Austin. She is recently retired and enjoys spending a month each summer with her son in Oregon.

Phoebe and Jane grew up in Refugio but spent most summers with their mother and extended family in a bay house off the Lamar Peninsula in Rockport. Their family consisted of 9 siblings; 6 boys and 3 girls. Their father said that if not for the 3 girls, he would have had enough boys for a baseball team. Their mother was mayor of Refugio for 8 years. Phoebe and Jane, along with sister Letha, undertook a family research project several years ago and traveled extensively to search through public records and visit graveyards for details of their family, which goes back to the Canary Islanders, and enabled them to join Daughters of the Republic. A historical fiction, [And the Day Came](#), was written about her family by sister-in-law Phyllis Moore.

Jane is interested in plants and plans to document many of the native plants in the Aransas Pathways parks and projects using iNaturalist. Phoebe loves to camp and hike in the woods. Phoebe wants to participate in the archeology project in Nursery, Texas. They both really enjoyed the training and like the people they have met in our Chapter, finding them apolitical, friendly, and helpful.

Congratulations to All Grads!



A Day at ANWR

By Phil Stapleton

My wife, Rebecca, and I have been coming to the refuge since our sons were babies and now we're sharing that experience with our grandson. As a retired Jr High Art Teacher, Rebecca connected with the Education Director at the refuge and started volunteering with youth activities as soon as we moved back to the Texas coast. We later both approached Laura Bonneau and asked if we could volunteer as Roving Interpretive Guides. We view our job as to enhance the experience visitors have while at the refuge. An added bonus is to help instill a love of nature with the youth that visit.



Juvenile White Ibis

Our day usually starts at Jones Lake where we'll set up shop for a couple of hours. If our job is to enhance the experience for our visitors, we obviously need to pick locations where people are most likely to visit. Our tools are a spotting scope, binoculars, nature journal (Rebecca) and camera (Phil). Since we are regular visitors at Jones Lake, we are very familiar with the flora and fauna that call it home. We know the three very large gators that mostly inhabit the west side of the lake under the willow trees, the Little Blue Herons that fish at the far southern water's edge and the White-Tailed Hawk that perches above the lake at the edge of the oaks to hunt for small prey.

Most of the time, we can identify wildlife that the typical visitor will not see when they make the brief visit out on the platform to see the lake. Part of the job as a Roving Interpretive Guide is to be able to read your audience. During the spring and fall bird migrations, a lot of avid birders will visit the refuge. We have found many of them prefer a solitary experience and just want to seek out birds...not conversation. They are pretty easy to spot and we are happy for them to enjoy their solitary experience. By far, most of the visitors we encounter are very

curious and want to learn as much as they can while they are visiting.

After spending the morning at Jones Lake, we will typically split up the afternoon between the Observation Tower, Heron Flats Trail and the Rail Trail Bridge. These locations are typically where visitors will make a stop and also have very different habitats. Our favorite spots are Jones Lake for the variety of wildlife and the Rail Trail Bridge for the up close encounters with the inhabitants of Thomas slough. Some of my best photos at the refuge are from the Rail Trail Bridge.

So, spending as much time as we do on the refuge, what are the most unique experiences we've had? Several come to mind. The inclination, when you are out on the observation platform at Jones Lake is to look at the lake. Sometimes, the best show is happening behind you in the oak



thicket. One morning in the fall, we were transfixed on the activities on the lake and heard a rustling behind us.



When we looked toward the thicket, we saw a Wild Turkey strutting along behind us. After stopping for me to get some great photos, she just popped up on the handrail of the platform and then proceeded to strut down the path to the parking area!

On another spring day, again at Jones Lake, I could hear the songbirds singing in the thicket and trained my spotting scope there instead of the usual lake position. Within a few minutes, I spotted a Painted Bunting and an Indigo Bunting. Several

weeks ago, while we were standing on the Rail Trail Bridge, with Thomas slough mostly dry, we saw the mud below us start to move and then out of the sludge crawled a juvenile alligator about two feet long.



He shook himself (or herself) off like a wet dog and then perched at the edge of the mud claiming his mud hole. Rebecca managed to get the whole thing on video. Have you ever heard the haunting roar of a male alligator in mating season? Several of the big boys on the west side of Jones lake decided to sound off several months ago...just to let the lady gators know they were available. Even though you can see where they are in the lake, you find yourself looking for a quick escape route...just in case.

It has also been very interesting to observe the refuge before and after the hurricane. While the man-made structures didn't fare so well, the refuge has seen a resurgence of wildlife. The staff has done a remarkable job clearing the trails and roads so visitors can explore pretty much as before the hurricane. Just from our observations on Jones Lake, the numbers of different birds we see on the lake has significantly increased.

We have met folks from many different countries and all over the United States. We even met a couple from my home town of Raleigh, NC.....go figure. If you love the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and like to meet people from all over, talk to Laura about volunteering as a Roving Interpretive Guide.