



# Member News

## September 2018

## Fall Highlights

Fall is finally here, and it is an especially busy time for Texas Master Naturalists. Our calendar is chock full of new volunteer and advanced training opportunities.



*Pack man frog in Halloween spirit.*

In Rockport, we had our HummerBird Celebration and Native Plant Sale in September. Although there was a lot of rain, we managed to sell a lot of plants. Our Outreach Booth featured hides collected from

naturally and accidentally deceased animals at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Scott Guilbeaux and Lisa DeVries brought some of their extensive collection of snakes to the booth. This issue contains an article about the couple and dispels some of the myths about these slithery creatures.

Brigid Berger reached an important milestone this year - 5,000 volunteer hours for the Mid-Coast Chapter. Brigid contributed an article about her and Allan's experiences as Texas Master Naturalists that provides inspiration for us all.

The State provided an article about the Gala celebrating the 20-year anniversary of the statewide Texas Master Naturalist program and links to the agenda of our state meeting to be held in Georgetown, Texas, October 26-28.

And, the Mid-Coast Chapter is hosting a Butterfly Tour of Gardens

and Workshop on October 6 that benefits our chapter, with native garden tours, a workshop, T-shirts, and a plant sale.

Take the time to enjoy the cooler weather, get outdoors, volunteer, and participate in these fun fall events.

*Cartoon contributed by Beth Hudson:*



*You know you're a naturalist when your wardrobe consists of camouflage clothing in shades of green and khaki. ~BFH '18*

## 5,000 Hours Later

by Brigid Berger

In my 30-year nursing career, I got bored easily and sought out many roles at Memorial Hermann in Houston. After completing a master's degree, I was burned out and needed some fun and divergence from the daily grind at the hospital, so I enrolled in a series of nature classes at the Houston Arboretum. There I discovered two things that would change the course of my life: I reconnected with nature and I met Allan Berger.

Allan introduced me to kayaking and fishing on the Texas Coast where he grew up and to the volunteer workdays at The Nature Conservancy's Mad Island Marsh Preserve. At Mad Island, we met Linda Serrill, a Mid-Coast chapter member who told us about of the Texas Master Naturalist program. Allan and I joined the chapter and completed the initial training in 2007. Eleven years later, I now serve as the volunteer coordinator at Mad Island and co-lead the chapter's Initial Training Class there on Coast Prairies and Wetlands.



*Seadrift Chamber of Commerce and San Antonio Bay Partnership celebrate the grand opening of the TPWD Seadrift Paddling Trail at Shrimpfest June 2018.*

One of my initiatives is to coordinate the Master Naturalist "TMN Tuesdays" at Victoria College's Academy of Lifelong Learning (ALL). After 5 semesters, this series of classes and field trips has developed

a loyal following and has recruited at least two new members for our chapter.

I seek out fellow chapter members to provide classes and field trips and I've led my fair share, as well. "You don't have to be an expert to teach a class or lead a trip."

Because of the success and popularity of TMN Tuesdays, Victoria College approached me about taking over their Kids Summer Camp. I recruited my fellow chapter members and together we developed the Junior Naturalist Camp. Over 20 children, ages 5 – 12 attended the week-long camp.



*Port O'Connor 4th & 5th Graders getting a close look at wetland critters that live in Boggy Nature Park, March 2018*

Another program which Allan and I developed together was a kid's birding program. One year at the HummerBird Celebration we were surprised to see a group of young children tramping through the vendor mall. The kids explained that they were a birding team from Fulton Learning Center and we were awe-stuck!

So, inspired by the kids enthusiasm for birding, Allan and I sat down with their teacher, Martha McLeod, and learned about her birding team and program. We went knocking at several local schools until we found a welcoming principal at Austwell-Tivoli ISD. We received a Dow Gives Community Grant and purchased binoculars, field guides and a spotting scope. For two years, our program provided one class and one field trip each month for their gifted and talented elementary and middle school students.



*Austwell-Tivoli ISD Birding Teams competing in the 2017 Great Texas Birding Classic.*

One last project that I want to mention and that I take great pride in is a 30-minute documentary that I produced about the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Matagorda County Mad Island Christmas Bird Count. This CBC has been the nation's leading bird count for number of species for 20 of its 25-year history. You can watch the documentary on YouTube. Right click and open hyperlink: [Mad Island, Matagorda Island Bird Count 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.](#)

The message that I'd like to send to my fellow Master Naturalists is that you can serve the community in many ways. You can help with ongoing projects or create your own. You don't have to be an expert, just willing to learn. Reach out to others and collaborate. There is no lack of things that can be done. And, before you know it, you'll be getting your 5,000-hour pin too! ~Brigid

## Yikes, Snakes!

New Mid-Coast Chapter members, Scott Gillbeaux and his wife, Lisa DeVries, have been collecting snakes and other reptiles for many years. In fact, they have a menagerie of animals, including a pot-bellied pig and four dogs at their home in Victoria.

Scott's earliest memory is of collecting green anoles when he was two and bringing them in the house to his mother, who he said, "freaked out." He sneaked snakes into his school lunch box, often getting in trouble with teachers. Lisa was also interested in nature at a young age, however, she grew up a city girl. When she met Scott, she was the first to name his snakes and now shares his interest in *Herpetology*, the branch of zoology dealing with reptiles and amphibians.

Scott and Lisa take their snakes to family-friendly events to educate and entertain children, who often are not as afraid of these fascinating reptiles as adults. The couple had a snake exhibit at the HummerBird Celebration in Rockport this month and it was a huge success. The exhibit included a large white bull snake named Sheila, two species of hognose snake, two species of rat snake, and Morris, the large coach whip snake.



*"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe—  
John Muir, American naturalist and conservationist*

There are over 109 species and sub-species of snakes in Texas and of those, only 15 are venomous. There are numerous protected species of snakes and other reptiles in Texas. These include the timber rattlesnake, Texas indigo snake, horned lizard, the Texas tortoise, and alligator snapping turtle.

Snakes evolved from reptiles that had legs. Scott showed this to some visitors on the boa constrictor, which had vestigial remnants of legs (they look like little bone spurs) on either side of her cloaca, the opening just above her tail.

Scott and Lisa order frozen rats and mice on-line for their snakes and don't need to feed them as frequently as their many mammals. For example, Consuela, the boa constrictor, eats one large rat about every 2 months. Some snakes, such as the Indigo snake and the king snake eat other snakes in the wild.

Snakes play a crucial role in nature and in the food web. They particularly control rodent populations, which carry disease and can damage crops and other property. Snakes also provide food for larger predators. Venom research provides cures for serious illness.

Snakes should not be wantonly destroyed any more than any other animal or plant. Most snakes will avoid interaction with people wherever possible. If you discover a snake, please consider its value before destroying it, or contact Scott and Lisa to remove the snake from your property and relocate it. They provide this service for free.

## SNAKE SAFETY

- Most snake bites occur when someone is trying to kill, capture, or handle a snake.
- If you have a snake on your property, it's best to have someone relocate the animal instead of capturing or killing it.
- If you are bitten by a venomous snake, **stay calm**, wash the bite area with a disinfectant, apply light pressure (not a tourniquet), and seek medical attention at a hospital.
- Prevent movement of the bitten area by splints and position the bitten limb at the level of the heart, if possible.
- Identify the snake that inflicted the bite, but do this carefully, so you do not end up with more than one bite, or victim.
- Do not make incisions, use ice, give alcohol, aspirin or other drugs, or attempt to suck out the venom.
- Death due to snakebite in Texas is very rare today.



## Butterfly Tour of Gardens and Workshop, October 6, 2018



Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalists are putting together a butterfly event on October 6, 2018.

Rebecca Stapleton designed a T-shirt for the event and we solicited 12 sponsors to pay for the T-shirt. The sponsors are Neli Spurrell-Realtor, Attitudes and Latitudes, Farmers Insurance, Winery on the Bay, Bloomers Nursery and Landscape, The Reserve, Rockport Graphics, 4 The Birds, Rockport Cultural Arts District, Bella la Rue, Chesapeake 495 Restaurant, and Keep Aransas County Beautiful.

For a \$25 donation, attendees will get perks, such as a free T-shirt,

### Butterfly Tour of Gardens and Workshop

October 6, 2018

8 a.m.- 12 p.m.

Tour of Pollinator Gardens

12:45 p.m.

Check in and Pick up T-Shirt

1:00 -4:00

Workshop at AgriLife, 895 Airport Blvd., Rockport, TX

All Day (8 a.m.-4 p.m.) NATIVE PLANT SALE- AgriLife

guaranteed reservation at the afternoon workshop, snacks, and printed materials. Speakers for the workshop will be Brigid Berger covering anatomy and life cycle of a butterfly; Ernie Schertz covering native plants for butterflies and pollinators; and Neli Spurrell covering types of butterflies found in Texas.

There will be a tour of seven public and private gardens in the morning and a **native plant sale** all day at the AgriLife site. These free events are open to the public. The public gardens include Ivy Lane, Linda S. Castro Sanctuary, Connie Hagar

Cottage Sanctuary, and the Master Gardeners Coastal Oaks Demonstration Garden. Master Gardeners or Master Naturalists will be at all these locations to answer questions and greet visitors. Neli Spurrell, Bob & Janet Cunningham, and Cindy Kuhn have also made their private home gardens available and will conduct tours.

For more information on these events, register at our website: [www.midcoast-tmn.org](http://www.midcoast-tmn.org) or email Pat Garland at [pjgarland@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pjgarland@sbcglobal.net).



### 20TH ANNIVERSARY HIGHLIGHTS; 2018 ANNUAL MEETING GALA CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

Over the course of our 20-year history, the Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) Program has trained over 11,000 passionate individuals who have engaged in over 4 million hours of volunteer service.

To commemorate this, our TMN 20th Anniversary Gala will be hosted Thursday, October 25th at the Sheraton Georgetown. The festivities will include a live band, a variety of live and silent auction items, and a celebratory presentation by founding Texas Master Naturalists.

Proceeds from the Gala will benefit the TMN Endowment Fund. For information right click and open hyperlink: <https://masternaturalistendowment.org/20th-anniversary-gala/>

### Annual Meeting Agenda

Our 2018 Annual Meeting schedule has been posted! With a record-breaking 150+ sessions, this year's conference will be the best yet. Make sure you are following us on Facebook and check "Going" on our event page for this year's Annual Meeting. There you will find links to our agenda, sponsor and contest information, and more. Right click and open hyperlink: [2018 Annual Meeting | Texas Master Naturalist](#)