



# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE **149**

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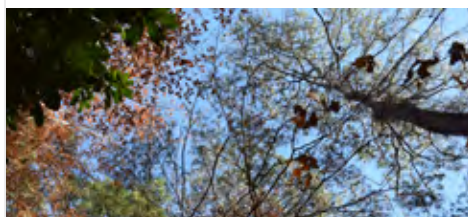
# INSIDE THIS ISSUE

## 2021

JANUARY  
FEBRUARY  
MARCH

3

A Message from the Executive Director »



4

Big Thicket Association's Wish List »



5

Congratulations, Bruce! »



6

Meet the Captain: Nick Huckaby »



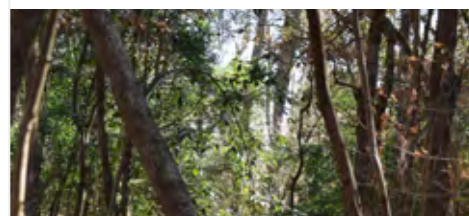
7

Grant Awarded to LU Special Collections »



8

39 Acres with Dogwood Trail Secured »



9

New Ivory Bill Signage »



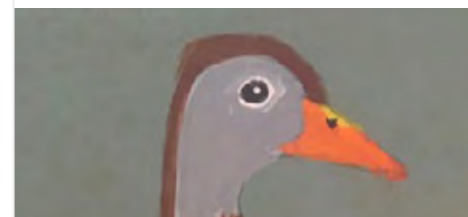
10

2020 Neches River Adventures Environmental Educator Report »



11

Black-bellied Whistling Duck »



12

Thicket of Diversity: 2020 Accomplishments »



13

Tree Planting during a Pandemic »



14-15

Remembering our friends »



## A Message from the Executive Director

Wendy Jo Ledbetter, BTA Executive Director

With the new year comes time for renewal and a fresh start. With the tumultuous year of 2020 behind us, the calendar provides us a great incentive to consciously reflect, make changes, commit to ideas, tasks, and positive outcomes.

This is a great time to act on your concern/passion to protect and conserve our natural world. There are many ways to do so—volunteering for a project or cause, sharing your love of the outdoor with your family and friends, voicing your political/social beliefs and support, exercising your purchasing power for sustainable and responsible businesses, and reducing your carbon footprint on the planet.

For those of you who joined the Big Thicket National Preserve to plant longleaf pine trees on their service days, thank you! For the Big Thicket Association, we have need for additional deckhands for programs and tours on the Ivory Bill, guest speakers for virtual programs, monitoring impactful conservation policies and programs, and more. What is your plan for positive change in 2021?! For over 50 years the Big Thicket Association has been steadfast in its mission, all due to people like you. Working together, much can be done! I hope you will join me this year in expanding our support of the national preserve, and impact for conservation in Southeast Texas.

Yours in conservation,  
Wendy Jo Ledbetter





# Wish list

*Partners in Preservation.*

The Big Thicket Association has a Wish List of household items, maintenance supplies, educational supplies and electronics needed for the Field Research Station & Learning Center, the Brammer House, the BTA Office and the Ivory Bill boat. For more details and to donate contact Wendy Jo Ledbetter, Executive Director. Email [director@bigthicket.org](mailto:director@bigthicket.org) or call 409-658-4300.

*Thank you to the following donors!*

- John Stafford – vacuum
- Jada Tullos Anderson – cutting boards and kitchen linens
- Sally Tullos – handmade potholders and hotpad

# Congratulations, Bruce!

By: John Stafford, BTA President

On January 9th, in recognition of outstanding leadership as Executive Director of the Big Thicket Association (BTA), Robert Bruce Walker was presented an original art work created by the internationally known and Nacogdoches-based forester-artist Bruce Lyndon Cunningham. The mixed media work depicts the association's inland passenger vessel, the IVORY BILL on the Neches River. Included on the picture frame is a plaque with Walker's name and dates of his term of office.

A native of Nacogdoches and alumnus of Stephen F. Austin University, Mr. Walker was integral to the establishment of BTA's Neches River Adventures programs, the annual Neches River Rally, and two officially recognized Texas Paddling Trails. He also established monthly hikes in the Big Thicket National Preserve. Mr. Walker holds the title of Master Captain from the United States Coast Guard and pilots IVORY BILL cruises on the Neches River.

Mr. Walker's longstanding support for environmental and conservation issues includes his membership on boards of the Texas Conservation Alliance, Clean Air and Water, the Sabine Neches Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist and both local and state boards of the Sierra Club. While with the Sierra Club, he secured a substantial Supplemental Environmental Project grant for BTA's Thicket of Diversity program.

During Mr. Walker's eight years with BTA, he combined his commitment to conservation of the environment with his considerable business and marketing education and experience. This combination resulted in significant funding from both private and governmental entities. Under Walker's leadership these resources increased the association's presence in the community; expanded programs and services for the public and academic community; assured sufficient attention to staff, facilities and equipment needs; and acquired land for conservation and investment. Additionally his term saw improvements in the modernization and expansion of internal controls of BTA's financial management systems, including employment of a certified public accountant.

Walker emphasized that "all BTA accomplishments during my tenure were made possible with the support and hard work of the past and current officers and board members that believed in BTA's mission and our vision to build on BTA's past successes."

Fortunately, Mr. Walker plans to continue serving as a board member, volunteer and captain on the IVORY BILL. We thank Bruce for his service and accomplishments and wish him "fair winds and following seas".

*Photo caption: BTA President John Stafford (l) congratulates former Executive Director Bruce Walker (r) on his recent retirement after serving with distinction for over 8 years (2012 – 2020)*



## Meet the Captain: Nick Huckaby

By: Bruce Walker, BTA Board Member & Ivory Bill Committee

Meet one of the Ivory Bill's newest Captains. Nick Huckaby has been serving as a deckhand since October 2018. He received his United States Coast Guard Master's License after attending the Maritime School at Lamar State College Orange this past fall.

Nick lives in Nederland with his wife Lynn. They have been married for 34 years and have two children and four grandchildren. Nick attended Nederland High and is a graduate from Lamar University. He retired from the petrochemical industry in 2018 after working there since 1973.

Nick Huckaby is a Life Member of the Big Thicket Association and serves as a Director on the BTA Board. Nick says that, "I've always had a great passion for all things outdoors and the natural environment. I became acquainted with the Big Thicket Association and Neches River Adventures through the Sabine Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist. I immediately signed up as a volunteer for Neches River Adventures aboard the Ivory Bill. It has been an outstanding learning event for me and an absolute joy to see the amazement of the general public and school age groups who experience the Big Thicket National Preserve aboard the Ivory Bill. I hope to continue my service for years to come."

Nick enjoys many outdoor activities with family and friends. He plans annual trips to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. See attached photo of Nick at the LeConte Lodge located at the summit of LeConte. The lodge is a popular hiking destination and is accessible only by foot.

Nick is also a member of the Coastal Conservation Association and the National Rifle Association, and he attained the rank of Eagle Scout in the Boy Scouts of America. Nick and Lynn are members of Wesley United Methodist Church in Nederland.

BTA is very thankful to have such a dedicated board member and active volunteer. Nick has proven to be a very resourceful and valuable asset to our organization.

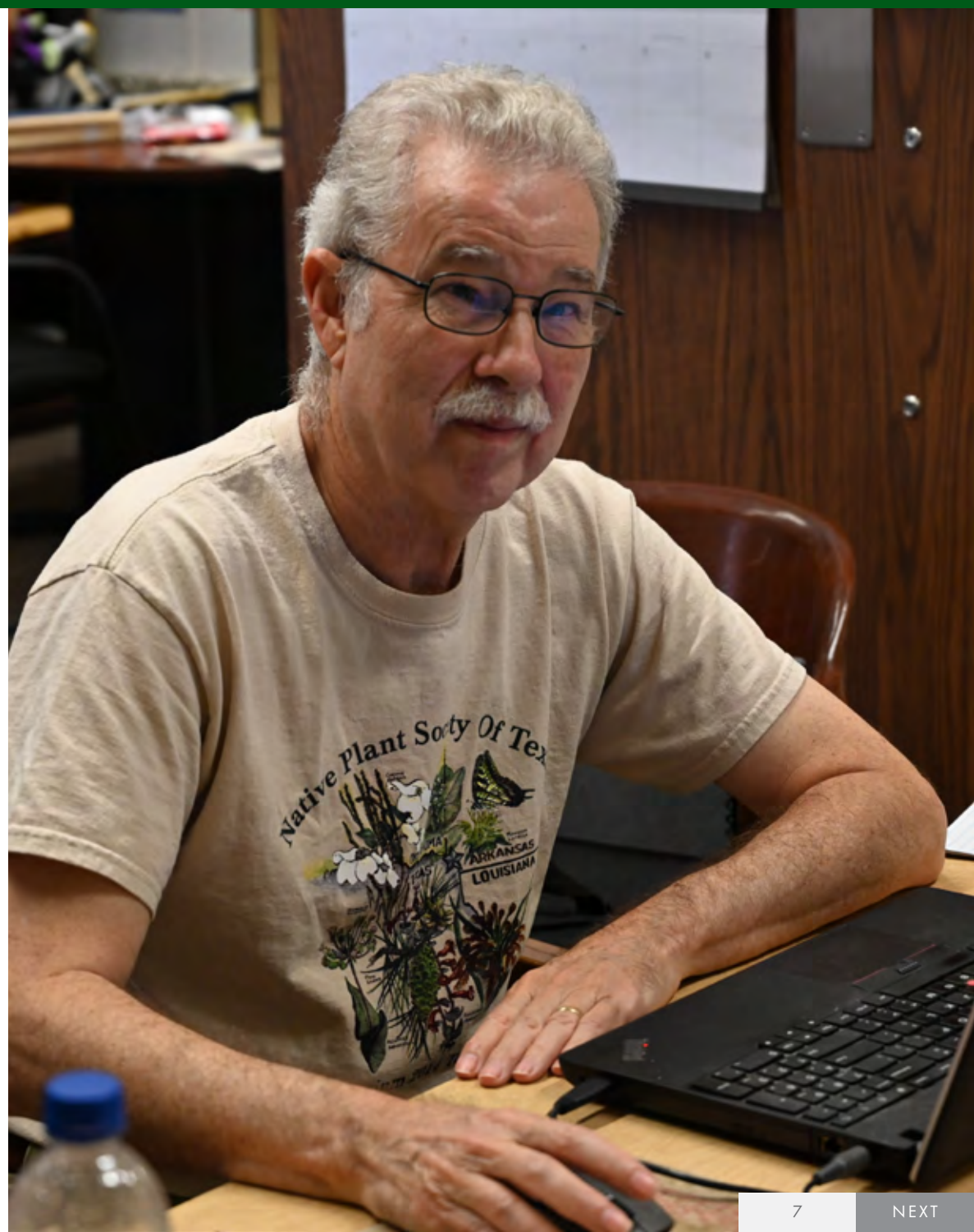


## Grant Awarded to LU Special Collections

Penny Clark is pleased to announce that Lamar University’s Special Collections was awarded a \$3,000 TexTreasures grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Texas State Library. The grant will fund the digitization and uploading of 750 images to the Portal to Texas History and the Lamar website. The photographs were all taken by mycologist David Lewis who earned both his degrees from Lamar University, his bachelor’s degree in 1972 and his master’s degree in 1978. Lewis utilized his biological education from Lamar both as a chemist for over 30 years and in his scientific study of mushrooms. He has published or co-published over 25 scientific papers and a book, *Mushrooms of the Gulf States: A Field Guide to Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida*, published by the University of Texas Press, 2019.

Lewis’ photographs span from 1971 to the present. They document many aspects of the Big Thicket including preservation efforts, field trips by Lamar students, and folk life, as well as ecological habitats, fauna and flora, including four of the five carnivorous plants of North America.

This project is funded by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services through a grant to the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (Grant Number TXT-21001).



## 39 Acres with Dogwood Trail Secured

The almost mile long Dogwood Trail is one of the last remaining “Woodland Trails” – a network of nature trails on private land that was maintained by the Texas Forestry Association. Most of the properties that were part of this regional public recreation amenity have since been closed to public access as privately owned timber lands have been sold and converted to other uses. The Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust didn’t want to see that happen to the Dogwood Trail.

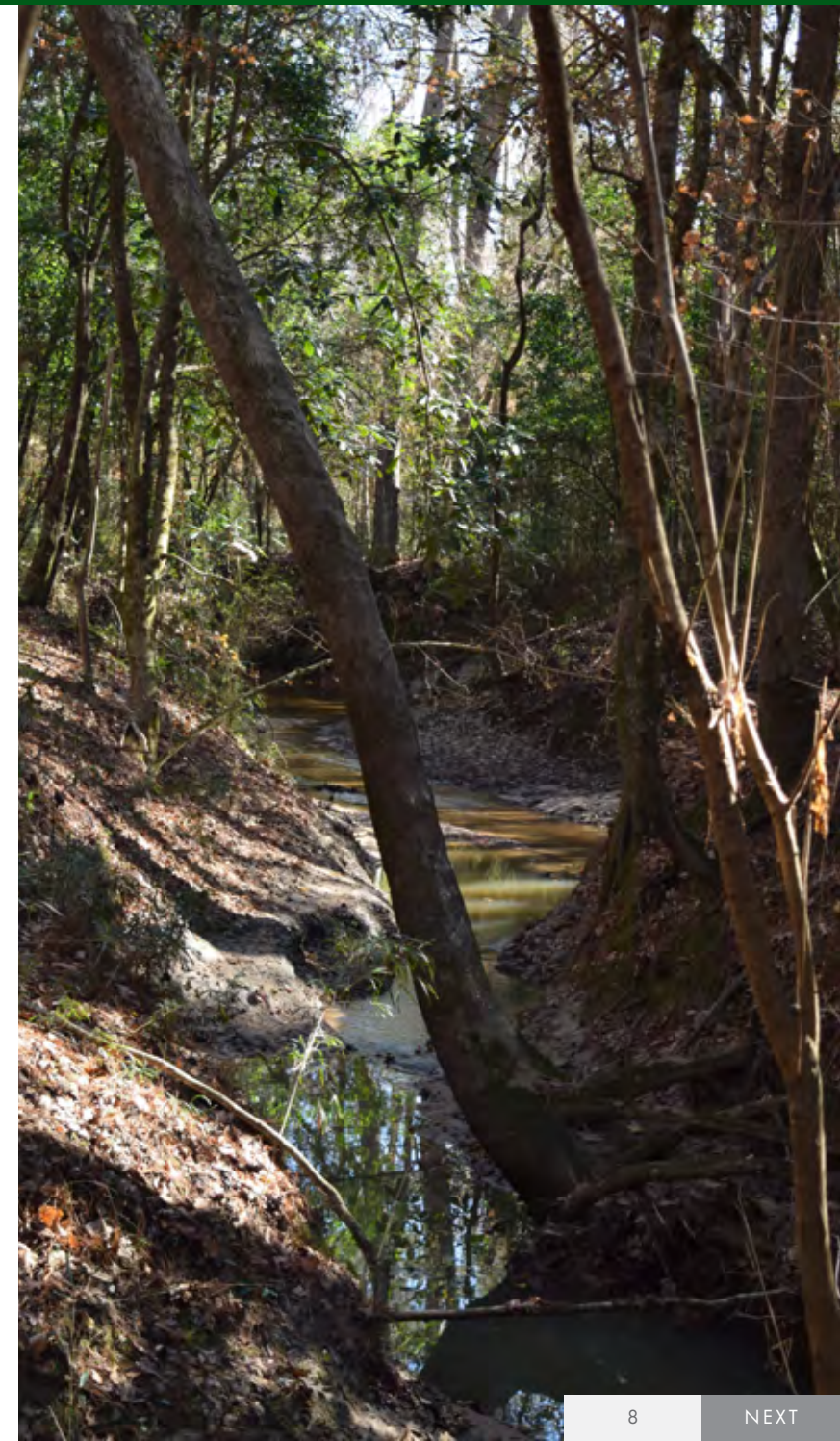
Founded in 1999 and driven by a group of energetic volunteers, the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust rallied partners and led a multi-year effort to purchase the 39-acre property from Hancock Natural Resource Group. The Trust secured a Federal Highway Administration National Recreational Trails Fund grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and raised matching funds for the grant from private donors, including three East Texas-based foundations. The Trust used a loan from the Conservation Loans Program of The Conservation Fund, a national environmental nonprofit, to close on the property and bridge the reimbursement style grant from the TPWD. Once the loan is repaid, the Trust will convey the property to the Texas A&M Forest Service. The property will initially be closed to the public while necessary repairs to the trail are completed, then opened permanently.

The Dogwood Trail is located three miles east of Woodville and winds through a tall forest of beech, magnolia and maple trees. Mature forests of this type are becoming rarer as many examples have disappeared due to development, timber management, catastrophic hurricane damage, and other impacts. The trail will offer an easily accessible way to experience the natural beauty of the Big Thicket’s rich woods.

The Trust would like to acknowledge and thank partners who provided financial assistance for the Dogwood Trail acquisition and renovation project: The Edaren Foundation, The Damuth Foundation, The Pineywoods Foundation, Ms. Maxine Johnston, Texas A&M Forest Service, The Conservation Fund and Texas Conservation Alliance.

Bob Warneke, President of the Damuth Foundation, said, “Several of our board members have walked the Trail, and we quickly realized the importance of insuring that the public had access to such a magical place.”

The mission of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust is to protect and conserve lands in southeast Texas to ensure that examples of natural landscapes are left intact for today and for the future. If you are interested in supporting land acquisition projects in the Big Thicket area, contact President Ellen Buchanan, [bigthickettrust@gmail.com](mailto:bigthickettrust@gmail.com) or visit [www.bigthickettrust.org](http://www.bigthickettrust.org).







### New Ivory Bill Signage

The Big Thicket Association installed new signage on the Ivory Bill featuring our Sponsors, Volunteers, & BTA Programs. We are getting ready for our spring 2021 tours. Tours: Saturday Public Tours resume on March 27th. Private Charters are available any month of the year, any day of the week, and any time of day. Free Environmental Education Classes are available to any school that qualifies. **All tours are by reservation only.**

<https://www.nechesriveradventures.org/> or 409-651-5326

## 2020 Neches River Adventures Environmental Educator Report

By: Terrie Looney, Ph.D.

The Neches River Adventure Program is one of Big Thicket Association’s educational outreach efforts. Operation of the Ivory Bill, a 45-ft. pontoon boat, provides a unique “floating classroom” for students and eco-tours for both public trips and private charters.

The onset of COVID-19, the closing of schools and other restrictions, had a significant impact on our ability to provide this outdoor experience. Schools were beginning to schedule for the spring field tours as quarantines began in March. In the fall, school closures continued. Once BTA was able to develop and initiate safety protocols for public trips, fall trips resumed with an 18 passenger (50% capacity) limit. The NRIB committee agreed to offering a special charter rate due to decreased capacity for the public.

To adapt to the public health situation, the Committee sought funds to create a series of virtual videos for widespread use. Local community partners, the Mamie McFaddin Ward Heritage Foundation, and BASF have provided \$9,000 to develop this project. Looney, Micah Leigh and Nancy Angell have prepared scripts to accompany video footage on specific themes and key learning concepts and vocabulary. Looney, Executive Director Ledbetter and Bruce Walker provided additional review. Looney and the Committee will work with a videographer for professional finishing. Production should begin in February/March 2021.

We gained three new captains for the Ivory Bill this summer. The Foundation for Southeast Texas funded two class tuitions for receiving captain’s certification at Lamar Orange. Volunteer deckhands Nick Huckaby and Tim Wynkoop can now serve as captains, too! Retired Executive Director Bruce Walker received his certification as well. Congratulations all! Their service will allow more flexibility in scheduling and cost savings to the organization.

We had a great group of volunteers who assisted with boat activities, including the JASON project. Using the volunteer time value of \$25.43 per hour, these volunteers contributed **\$2,924.45** worth of service. Volunteers also assisted with 18 boat trips and the NRIB Committee contributed approximately 72 hours. The estimated value of volunteer contribution for the 2020 Neches River Adventure Program is **\$6,984.01**.



"A popular viewing spot, the Big Thicket National Preserve encompasses 108,000 acres and has been recognized as a globally important bird area by the American Bird Conservancy." – Dallas Morning News

## Black-bellied Whistling Duck

*Dendrocygna autumnalis*  
By: Phoebe H. Dishman, BTA Director/BTA Bulletin Editor

In the hush of the Thicket I have heard  
a chattering, sociable, boisterous bird.  
When in flight they can't be quiet—  
an exultation, a musical riot!  
With rosy legs and bellies of black,  
They're whimsical ducks, and that's a fact.  
Their bills are bright, a coral-pink.  
They're 'oddly gooselike', some folks think.  
Crazy mohawk on their crown,  
a quirkier duck could not be found.  
They have tons of babies which they lead  
beside the pond, across the mead,  
into the marsh and grassy swards,  
down the street and through front yards.  
Extending their necks just like a swan,  
they look for trees to perch upon.  
If not a tree, a stump will do  
or a human arm—it's on YouTube!  
Quirky birds I find beguiling—  
I hear them above and find I'm smiling,  
and all the more that years ago,  
before this duck to me was known,  
my son saw one in a Houston bayou,  
took mental notes, described it just so.  
We looked in the bird book and what do you think?  
A whistling duck, with legs of pink!



Painting by Isabelle Scurry Chapman

# Thicket of Diversity: 2020 Accomplishments

By: Mary C. Johnston

This year has been a time of reflection, restructuring, and change for the BTA's Thicket of Diversity. Since its founding in 2006, over 30 researchers from institutions across the nation and internationally have conducted inventory work in Southeast Texas. Over 3,263 species have been identified including species New to the Preserve, New to Texas, and New to Science!

Covid 19 restrictions have paused collection in the Preserve. However, there are still 3 active Big Thicket research projects. Alison Tarter from Texas State University is working on her second Mussel Biodiversity Survey and is evaluating population response to catastrophic flooding. Stephen F. Austin University's Dr. Daniel Bennett, and Sam Houston State University's Dr. John Pascarella, continue identifying bees and to date have inventoried over 90 species. Patricia Weaver, Anna Phillips, B.W. Williams and William Moser of North Carolina Museum of Science are surveying leeches.

All research is reported to the Big Thicket National Preserve for inclusion in their data base. Thicket of Diversity research focuses on Wetland Species and Ecosystem Analysis and receives penalty monies from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) enforcement actions. Funds are currently available for new research.

COVID-19 has created housing issues for the Thicket of Diversity. Academic institutions have restricted or eliminated field trips, gatherings and travel. Under federal guidance, the Preserve closed the Field Research Station and Learning Center and the Brammer House beginning in March. In September, NPS asked BTA to prepare COVID protocol for the buildings. Executive Director Ledbetter drafted the document; NPS reviewed and accepted it. In November Supt. Prokopetz allowed

the Brammer House to be used again under the COVID guidelines. The Field Research Station remains closed for use until approval by Supt. Prokopetz.

BTA leadership under John Stafford and Bruce Walker solicited grants for FRSLC renovation and capital improvements. Over \$85,000 was raised from the Edaren Foundaton and other sources. New plumbing and A/C were installed. The State Fire Marshall inspected and approved the mandated installation of new sprinkler and alarm systems. Reopening and use of this facility will demonstrate to future funders of BTA that the organization is providing essential service for its conservation mission.

In April, teacher Mary Johnston organized a virtual book signing for David Lewis in partnership with the Friends of Kountze Public Library. Lewis is a past ToD macrofungi researcher.

The ToD Data Management Team did extensive re-organization of digital documents and the organization's history. IT Specialist Dale Parish set up a GoogleOne account. Administrative data was analyzed and records were digitized and filed in appropriate, consistent subfolders for easy access.

A new BTA Executive Director was hired in September. Wendy Jo Ledbetter replaces Bruce Walker, who retired in the fall of 2020. Ledbetter has 39 years of conservation and management experience most recently as Forest Program Manager for the Texas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. She is a former officer of the BTA and served as Past President of the Thicket of Diversity. Her expertise, along with the 2020 renovation and reorganization efforts, will continue to guide Thicket of Diversity research into the new year and beyond.



Photograph: Graduate student Archie Sauls of Stephen F. Austin State University, servicing a Malaise trap in the Turkey Creek Unit. Photo by Dr. Daniel J. Bennett (Bee Researcher)

# Tree Planting during a Pandemic

By: Megan Urban, BITH Community Outreach and Volunteer Program Manager

How does one plan a volunteer event that normally hosts hundreds of volunteers during a pandemic? Well, the staff at Big Thicket had to get creative and think of ways to not only socially distance the trees but also the volunteers. Besides doing one smaller event on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the Big Thicket staff decided to host a second event on Presidents Day, to split the number of trees in half to make it more manageable for the staff and volunteers. On both days, volunteers were asked to register for a specific start time, were kept in smaller groups and were socially distanced in the planting area, which was just over 500 acres. Big Thicket Association helped with providing water bottles for volunteers, so volunteers weren't gathering around a shared water cooler.

32 volunteers were on site on Martin Luther King Jr. Day to plant just over 5,000 trees! The event that was scheduled for Presidents Day had to be rescheduled due to the winter storm that impacted the area. On Saturday, February 20th, 17 volunteers came out and planted 3,200 trees.

In the coming years, Big Thicket is planning to make the tree planting a three-month event, with volunteer tree plantings happening in December, January and February.



# I N M E M O R Y



Photo credit: Jan Ruppel

## Elaine Allums

1943-2021

Elaine’s commitment to family, community, education and the environment are an inspiration in a divisive world. She tirelessly advocated for the needs of Southeast Texas and brought folks together with her leadership and networking skills, her smiles, and her Southern hospitality.

Allums earned a BA from Lamar University in 1966. She taught one year in Lumberton ISD and spent the next 30 years with Kountze ISD. Upon her retirement in 1999, she was appointed to the Kountze City Council and served as Mayor Pro Tem since that time. Elaine was Vice President of the Kountze Economic Development Corporation and a member of the South East Texas Regional Planning Commission Executive Committee. She is past chairman of the Leadership Southeast Texas Advisory Council (2008-2010) and was a member of the Governing Board as well as a Board member of the Foundation for Southeast Texas.

Elaine was active as Chair of the Kountze Public Library Building Committee in 1999 and was instrumental in the construction of a new library building. She served as President of the Friends of Kountze Public Library from 2008-2019 where she regularly coordinated children’s programs. She began volunteering on the Library Advisory Board in 2008.

For many years Elaine was an active Director with the Big Thicket Association and worked to promote and preserve the resources of the Big Thicket. She served as BTA’s Secretary and Hospitality Chair. She promoted Hardin County tourism and served as treasurer of the Kirby-Hill House Museum Board and the Busy Homemakers. Regionally, Allums promoted the arts as a member of the Symphony of Southeast Texas Board and loved volunteering as an usher at the Hobby Center in Houston.

Elaine was a faithful member of First United Methodist Church in Kountze. She is survived by her husband, Donald, and two daughters, all teachers. She had four grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Elaine’s love of family and dedication to the community are a shining example demonstrating what can be accomplished with a sense of purpose and a spirit of goodwill. Those who were close to Elaine know the secret of her organizational success. It was the use of sticky notes!



# I N M E M O R Y

## Floyd Landrey

1934 - 2021

BTA is sad to report the death of Floyd Landrey on February 12, 2021. He served as BTA Board President from 1981-83. He is survived by his wife Wanda Landrey, local author. Some of her files on local history are in the Lamar Gray Library Special Collections. For his full obituary please [click here](#).

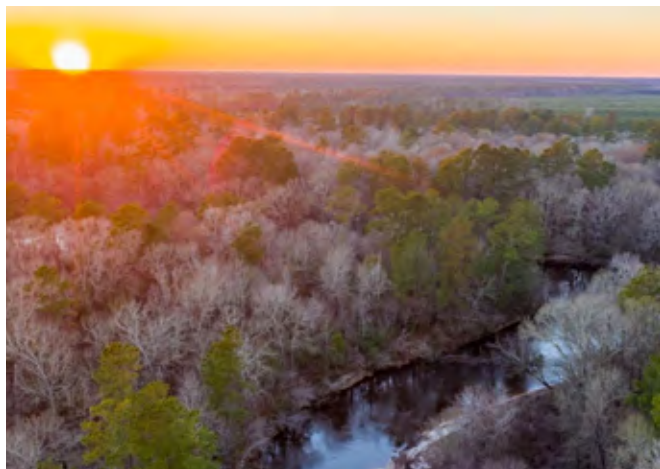
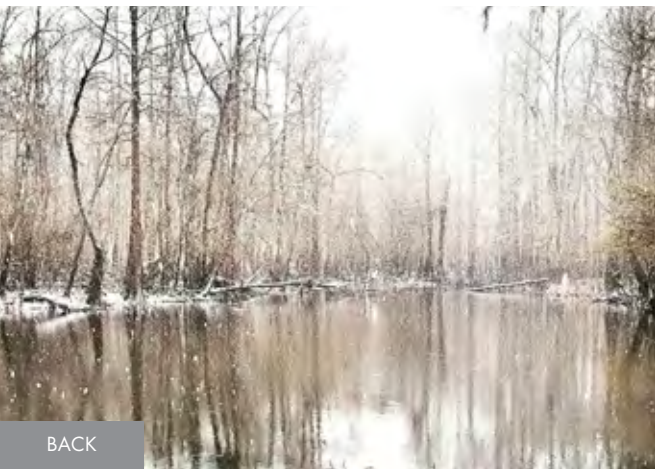




# BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

#BIGTHICKET







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# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

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Big Thicket Association  
[www.bigthicket.org](http://www.bigthicket.org)

**Web Sites**  
Big Thicket Association  
[www.bigthicket.org](http://www.bigthicket.org)

Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust  
[www.bigthickettrust.org](http://www.bigthickettrust.org)

Big Thicket National Preserve  
[www.nps.gov/bith](http://www.nps.gov/bith)

Conservation Fund  
[www.conservationfund.org](http://www.conservationfund.org)

Gulf States Mycological Society  
[www.gsmco.org](http://www.gsmco.org)

National Audubon Society  
[www.goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org)  
[www.houstonaudubon.org](http://www.houstonaudubon.org)

National Parks Conservation Association  
[www.npca.org](http://www.npca.org)

Native Plant Society of Texas  
[www.npsot.org](http://www.npsot.org)

Nature Conservancy  
[www.nature.org/texas](http://www.nature.org/texas)

Outdoor Nature Club, Houston  
[www.outdoornatureclub.org](http://www.outdoornatureclub.org)

Sierra Club Golden Triangle Group  
[www.texas.sierraclub.org/triangle](http://www.texas.sierraclub.org/triangle)

Texas Black Bear Alliance  
[texasblackbear.weebly.com](http://texasblackbear.weebly.com)

Texas Conservation Alliance  
[www.TCAtexas.org](http://www.TCAtexas.org)

Texas Master Naturalist Association,  
Sabine Neches Chapter  
[www.txmn.org/sabine](http://www.txmn.org/sabine)

Village Creek State Park  
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us.park](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us.park)

## Big Thicket Association Mission

The purposes for which the Big Thicket Association is organized are

- » To work for the preservation of the flora, fauna and historical culture of the Big Thicket area
- » To promote the conservation of natural resources and natural history of the Big Thicket area, and education for same
- » To maintain and perpetuate, so far as possible, the many species of trees, plants and animals found in the Big Thicket area, and to do whatever else may be done to preserve for posterity the abundance of flora and fauna and natural beauty with which this area has been endowed
- » To promote and to fund research contributing to knowledge of the Big Thicket area
- » To publish or support publication of cultural and scientific Big Thicket literature
- » To promote the welfare of the Big Thicket National Preserve

For more information about the Big Thicket Association and upcoming events, please click here to visit us online.

## Follow Us

