



# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 152



START >

# INSIDE THIS ISSUE

## 2021

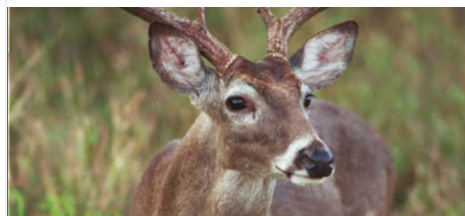
OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

3

A Message from the President »



4

A Message from the Executive Director »



5

Perfect Paddling – 8th Annual Neches River Rally »



7

BTA Office News »



8

BTA Welcomes Administrative Assistant »



9

Big Thicket Day 2021 »



12

Big Thicket Happenings »



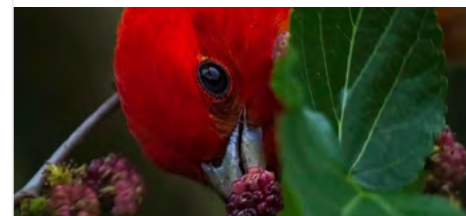
13

Josie Gunter, Young Conservationist »



14

“Fruit of the Thicket” »



15

Save the Dates and Membership Mailings »



16

Remembering Ann Liggio »



## A Message from the President

John Stafford, BTA director and board president

At the end of 2021, members of BTA can look back proudly on the Neches River Rally and Big Thicket Day, our two biggest events. It felt "right" to be back in person after observing COVID restrictions for over a year. We received compliments on both and hope for even bigger and better in 2022.

Everyone appreciated the work of the Big Thicket Day committee and our sponsors for a well-organized, fun family event at Colliers Ferry Park. Our keynote speaker, Matt Buckingham, provided a most informative presentation.

We are so grateful to our Rally and Big Thicket Day sponsors who offered necessary financial and logistical support for these events and to the many volunteers who managed activities, programs and refreshments. A big "shout out" to these sponsors and supporters: Lower Neches Valley Authority (LNVA), American Valve & Hydrant, Beaumont Convention & Visitors Bureau, Ellen C. Temple, Mobil Oil Federal Credit Union, Port of Beaumont, Pt. Arthur LNG, TotalEnergies, and WestRock. Donation of goods and services were provided by Big Thicket Outfitters, Eastex Automotive, Neil-Troy Advertising, Read Ice and volunteers from Texas Master Naturalist Sabine Neches Chapter, and Westbrook High School Navy Jr. Officers Reserve Training Corps.

BTA members who have a particular interest in conservation and preservation of the Big Thicket National Preserve are encouraged to participate in the first of three Long Leaf Pine plantings. The first is Saturday, December 11th in Big Sandy Creek Unit. Participants will meet at the planting site at 9am. Further details and specific directions are available on NPS/BITH website and in forthcoming emails.

Our new Director of Environmental Education, Jenny Knapp, has been hard at work preparing for a very busy spring season. She has started reaching out to science educators throughout the Big Thicket area counties to schedule their spring classes. The Neches River Adventures "floating classroom" offers educational opportunities for teachers, students and other related groups. The TEKS aligned curriculum includes a 2-hour Field Lab for 5th - 12th grade, as well as a 1-hour Habitat Lesson for pre-K - 4th grade. Students will learn about the historical and ecological importance of the Big Thicket. They will experience plants and animals associated with the Big Thicket and Neches River as they travel up one of the many bayous associated with the Cypress/Tupelo Swamp.

Our Executive Director Wendy Ledbetter has taken a new, exciting job in Georgia. See more in her article. We are already missing her as guess who is trying to cover for her! We wish her the best success and know she will enjoy new challenges while living closer to her family. The position is posted on our website and we hope a good candidate will come forward very soon.

We have many challenges ahead implementing our new Strategic Plan as well as raising funds for ongoing programs. We will look to our past sponsors and members to help financially and with their time and talents. We look forward to a great 2022.



*Art credit, Geraldine Watson (1925-2012), naturalist and conservationist, artist, author, ecologist, and one of the individuals responsible for the creation of the Big Thicket National Preserve*

## A Message from the Executive Director

Wendy J. Ledbetter, BTA Executive Director

Dear Friends,

I hope many of you enjoyed the Neches River Rally and the Big Thicket Day on the Neches events this fall. What a treat it was to have our keynote speaker Matt Buckingham for our annual membership meeting and Big Thicket Day on the Neches. Matt's expertise and passion for East Texas inspired the audience to think of the primitive and historic Big Thicket and reminded us of the great natural heritage that still is represented today. It is important that as a long-standing conservation group of southeast Texas, BTA continues to support the science that documents and informs us of species and natural systems. With science as a foundation, BTA's education and outreach to the community provides a much-needed voice for fostering awareness and meaning to our valued natural and cultural resources that define the Big Thicket.

With the recent news of the official extinction declaration for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (the namesake of the BTA's vessel), it reminds us that our resources are finite and require our care and stewardship. For over 50 years, the Big Thicket Association has continued as a core group of resolute individuals to achieve this important work.

Finally, as Executive Director I have appreciated the opportunity to work with everyone on furthering the mission of BTA. I thank you for your interest, support, and efforts for our programs, events, staff, and the organization. As you may know, I accepted a position with the Longleaf Alliance and will be serving in Savannah, Georgia as the Ft. Stewart Altamaha Partnership Coordinator to advance forest protection and restoration with public and private partners including military installations. Just like in Texas, the work in Georgia will be contributing to the range-wide conservation effort to conserve native longleaf pine forests, pitcher plants bogs, and bottomland hardwood forests of the coastal plain.

I have devoted the past 28 years of my life to the longleaf, orchids, swamp chestnut oaks, warblers, and wildflowers of the Big Thicket - a simple dot on the timeline for this landscape. I wish all of you and the Big Thicket Association continued success on the journey.

Respectfully,  
Wendy J. Ledbetter



Photo credit, John Stafford

# Perfect Paddling – 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Neches River Rally

by Wendy J. Ledbetter, Executive Director

The 8th Annual Neches River Rally was held Saturday, September 11th. It was a perfect day for paddling with a cool morning, calm water, and sunny skies. Eighty-seven participants enjoyed the 4.8-mile loop trail route of the TPWD Cooks Lake to Scatterman paddling trail. Launching from the Lower Neches Valley Authority Saltwater Barrier, participants enjoyed the open water and experiencing the bald cypress-water tupelo backwaters.

Rally sponsors included American Valve & Hydrant, Beaumont Convention & Visitors Bureau, Ellen C. Temple, LNVA, Mobiloil Credit Union, Port of Beaumont, Pt. Arthur LNG, TotalEnergies, and WestRock.

Donation of goods and services were provided by Big Thicket Outfitters, Eastex Automotive, Neil-Troy Advertising, and Read Ice.

Attendees enjoyed lunch provided by Eastex Automotive and BTA, and Kona Ice snow cones.

Special thanks to the LNVA staff for facility support and Acadian Ambulance Service for logistical support.

Special thanks to Phillip Boone and the Westbrook High School Navy Jr. Officers Reserve Training Corps for assisting paddlers.

For serving as river guide support, special thanks to Big Thicket National Preserve staff members Megan Urban, Heidi Dietze, Ian Kessler, Abigail Epplert, Ian Wilder, Ella Maloney, Jake Schultze, and Merrick Moody.

A big thank you to our staff, board members, advisory board members and volunteers who make the Rally happen each year. We appreciate you!

Proceeds of the event support the BTA's programs of environmental education/outdoor learning and supporting science & research in the Big Thicket region.

To view a photo gallery of the Rally, visit the Big Thicket Association website.

<https://www.bigthicket.org/rally/photos2021>



Photo credits from top to bottom John Stafford, Tara Nichole Bryant, and Tara Nichole Bryant

## BTA Office News

**Bruce Walker, BTA Director & NRIB Committee Chair**  
Past BTA Executive Director

Tera Adler, BTA Office Assistant, officially retired effective October 31st after serving over 5 years in BTA's new office space in Beaumont. In 2016, BTA was able to secure funding for the office assistant's position through a Senior Community Service Employment Program Grant, which provided funding for 2 years. In May 2018, Ms. Adler joined BTA's staff.

Tera is a long-time active member in the Golden Triangle Sierra Club, where she served as Outing Chair for several years and has spent many days hiking and doing trail work on the Trail Between the Lakes in the Sabine National Forest. Also, she is an active member of the Sabine Neches Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist.

While working in the BTA organization, Tera assisted the Association through many changes and the introduction of new projects and programs. She was the voice of the BTA office when responding to questions or making reservations for the Neches River Rally, Neches River Adventures Tours & School Field Trips, Big Thicket Day, and the Field Research Station & Learning Center, while maintaining BTA's QuickBooks entries and updating office files. Out of the office, Tera assisted with the land-based activities for the Environmental Education Classes and occasionally served as Deckhand aboard the Ivory Bill.

In addition to Tera's love for the outdoors and many years of camping, hiking, and kayaking, she has been and continues to look out for animals in need. She has rescued many cats and dogs that were mistreated or abandoned. She is a great reference for placing or finding homes for rescued animals.

We wish Tera the best in retirement and hope that she will remain connected to BTA.



*Tera Adler (L) and Jaclyn Parker (R), hiking the Trail Between the Lakes.  
Photo credit, Tara Nichole Bryant*

## BTA Welcomes Administrative Assistant

Wendy J. Ledbetter, BTA Executive Director

Big Thicket Association is pleased to have Jaclyn Parker serving as our new Administrative Assistant. Jaclyn received her Associate of Applied Science & Business Management degree and Accounting Certificate from Lamar State College Orange. She has experience working independently and with business teams in Southeast Texas, including 16 years in Accounts Payable and Receivable.

Jaclyn is an active member of the Sabine Neches Texas Master Naturalist Chapter and has served as Secretary for the group. She has previously volunteered as an interpreter on the Ivory Bill. Being active in outdoor recreation with her family, Jaclyn knows the places to hike, camp, and paddle and is happy to share that information with the public. Well versed in plant ecology, she is a self-taught herbalist as well.

**Welcome Jaclyn!**





# Big Thicket Day



Free Neches Tours aboard the Ivory Bill: Photo by Katy Hambricht

## Big Thicket Day 2021

by Katy Hambricht, BTA director

Big Thicket Day 2021, held October 9 at the historic Collier’s Ferry Park, was a great success, thanks to our exhibitors and vendors; the captains and crew of the Ivory Bill; Cooks 2 Dozen; keynote speaker and his wife, Matt and Carolina Buckingham; and our many visitors. Special thanks also to dedicated BTA board members, volunteers from Texas Master Naturalist Sabine Neches Chapter, and Westbrook JNROTC Cadets and teachers, who came together to set up the event site at 7:00 that morning. Big Thicket Day is free and is open to the public. The event is held annually to celebrate the establishment of the BTA in 1964 and the Big Thicket National Preserve in 1974.

The band, Long Sunday Drive, added a festive air to the proceedings with their toe tapping modern bluegrass tunes, even inspiring an impromptu dance or two by park patrons and exhibitors. Cooks 2 Dozen provided mouthwatering hamburgers, hot dogs and links to keep everyone well fed and energized during the day’s activities.

Keynote speaker Matt Buckingham – noted naturalist, photographer, and protected species biologist – sparked our imaginations with “The Diverse World of the Big Thicket: Exploring the Plants and Animals of a Biodiversity Hotspot,” in which he offered glimpses of the Big Thicket as it existed two hundred years ago, and shared stunning images from his personal experiences. Phoebe Dishman offered a wonderful invocation centered on the fruits of the Big Thicket.

Bluebird skies reigned over the park. It is estimated that we had close to 300 visitors (even a few four-footed friends!) throughout the day. Smiles abounded.

Stable Spirit’s horses were a huge draw with park visitors. The gentle beasts were groomed until their coats gleamed. The Beaumont Children’s Museum’s “bubbles” and Phillip White the Falconer’s red-tailed hawk and aplomado falcon were also quite popular. Families were enraptured by exhibits from the Big Thicket Association, BTA Thicket of Diversity, Lamar Special Collections, Native Plant Society of Texas, Texas A & M Forest Service, Texas Master Naturalist Sabine Neches Chapter and Village Creek State Park.

*Maxine Johnston, BTA advisory board, longtime leader of conservation efforts in East Texas. Photo credit, Carl Knight, ToD committee member*



*"Watershed," by Donna Work, Texas A&M Forest Service: Photo by Katy Hambricht*





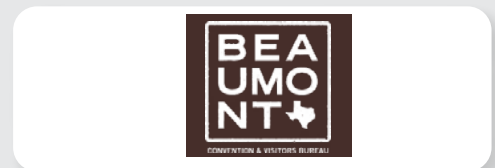
Horse grooming, by Stable Spirit: Photo by Katy Hambricht



Bubbles, by the Children's Museum: Photo by Katy Hambricht

Leaf art, animal pelts, soil erosion demonstrations – there was something for everyone. Kids of all ages loved learning how to paddle canoes and kayaks with the help of Big Thicket Outfitters. The Neches River Adventures’ Ivory Bill conducted five tours throughout the day in order to accommodate the many visitors who wanted to take advantage of the beautiful weather and join us on the Neches River. BTA members helped with financial support.

**A very special thank you to our major sponsors for underwriting this free event: LNVA, Port of Beaumont, TotalEnergies, WestRock, and Beaumont CVB.**





Kayak trip on Village Creek

# Big Thicket Happenings

Megan Urban, BITH Chief of Interpretation and Education

As the fall turns into winter, Big Thicket’s interpretation team is gearing up for another busy season full of ranger-led hikes and paddle trips. Although we are still limiting the number of visitors to 10 on these programs, the trips have been very well received by the public. We are also working on re-launching the Youth Paddle Programs, which are ranger-led kayak programs designed to introduce youth organizations to the Big Thicket and to stewardship of the area. If you work with a youth organization and are interested in signing up for this FREE program, email [bith\\_paddleprogram@nps.gov](mailto:bith_paddleprogram@nps.gov) for more information.

On the volunteer side of the program, we continue to offer our monthly trash clean-ups around the Preserve for those who like to do a short volunteer experience. For those who are looking forward to our annual longleaf tree-planting event happening on Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, we are excited to offer three opportunities to plant trees alongside other volunteers and park staff. To sign up for these events, volunteers are asked to go to Texas Conservation Alliance website at [www.tcatexas.org](http://www.tcatexas.org) and follow the link on the event page.

Take some time to get outside while you can outrun the mosquitoes!

## Josie Gunter, Young Conservationist

by Mary Catherine Johnston, BTA director

The talents of Josie Gunter and her interest in science and nature were recognized during her years at Kountze High School. Josie’s interesting artwork depicting human anatomy and the teen’s enthusiasm after a visit to the school by a Thicket of Diversity crawfish researcher were noted. Josie furthered her education at the University of North Texas and graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor’s of Science for Ecology in Environmental Science.

Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust officers understood the critical need to attract younger generations to sustain future conservation work. In 2018 Josie, as an undergraduate, was invited to serve on the Board of Directors. The experience serving with the Trust helped build her résumé and provided opportunities for experienced “elders” to serve as mentors. Additionally, Josie volunteered as a Summer Intern at Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Isle du Bois and helped with maintenance. In 2019 Josie participated in the Region 5 Teacher Certification Program and after graduation worked as a substitute teacher. She also served as a Texas State Park Ambassador for Village Creek State Park.

Today, Josie is employed as a Park Interpreter with Texas Parks and Wildlife. She is stationed at Lake Corpus Christi State Park in Mathis, Texas. Her continued efforts on the Board of Directors of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust are valued and sincerely appreciated.



## “Fruit of the Thicket”

Phoebe H. Dishman, BTA director and Bulletin editor  
Invocation for General Meeting  
Big Thicket Day, October 9, 2021

Gathered here, we now address  
the One whose care we now confess,  
who carved the Neches where we stand,  
who walks the Thicket, sacred land.  
Friend of the Thicket is our name,  
preservation is our aim—  
standing witness, advocating,  
counting species, educating—  
these the fruits of friendship true,  
and so we offer them to you,  
you who formed fruit from the start—  
Thicket fruit, with poet’s art:  
Blueberries wild and blackberry patches—  
watch out for critters and bramble scratches!  
Rose hips, maypop, muscadine  
(beloved source of jelly and wine),  
prickly pear whose skin alarms  
but fruit inside delights and charms,  
dewberry, farkleberry, flatwoods plum,  
ground cherry, partridgeberry, pawpaw, yum!

Parsley hawthorn, blackhaw treats—  
so much fruit for us to eat!  
Elderberry, mulberry, hackberry seed—  
if we had to forage we could indeed.  
Japanese honeysuckle, please don’t snub—  
by the joy of its nectar, it joins the club.  
Lord of all, and all divine,  
the One who blesses fruit and wine  
the One who growls each hungry belly,  
the One in whose image we jar our jelly—  
we your partners in preservation,  
conservation, education,  
we honor the gathering days of yore,  
we trust that fruit is still in store.  
Hearts aglow and Thicket for all—  
hear us now, as now we call.  
Amen.



*Scarlet tanager feasting on mulberry.  
Photo credit, Thomas Finnie*



## SAVE THE DATES

### Ivory Bill Tours

Neches River Adventures private charters are available all year. Free school field trips are available to qualifying schools.

[www.nechesriveradventures.org](http://www.nechesriveradventures.org)

### Saturday, December 11, 2021, Volunteer Day of Service

Longleaf Pine Tree Planting, Big Thicket National Preserve

### Monday, January 17, 2022, MLK Volunteer Day of Service

Longleaf Pine Tree Planting with Big Thicket National Preserve

### Monday, February 22, 2022, Presidents' Day Volunteer Day of Service

Longleaf Pine Tree Planting with Big Thicket National Preserve



Monday, October 18: Randy Beehn's sore paw notwithstanding, BTA board and staff prepare 900+ membership mailings. It's rumored there was pizza.

*Photo credit, Katy Hambright*

# I N M E M O R Y



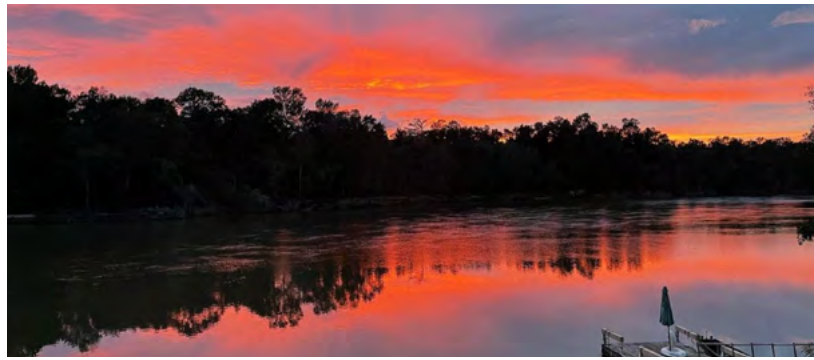
## Ann Liggio

1950-2021

On October 16, 2021, the Big Thicket Association lost valued member Ann Orto Liggio. With her husband Joe Liggio, she co-authored *Wild Orchids of Texas*, published by the University of Texas Press in 1999. The book received Best of Show and Award of Distinguished Technical Communication in the 2000 Internet Publishers Competition. Ann was a devoted volunteer to many causes including the Red Cross, Interfaith Ministries, and Mental Health Association. She was a long time stable attendant for the Houston Mounted Police.



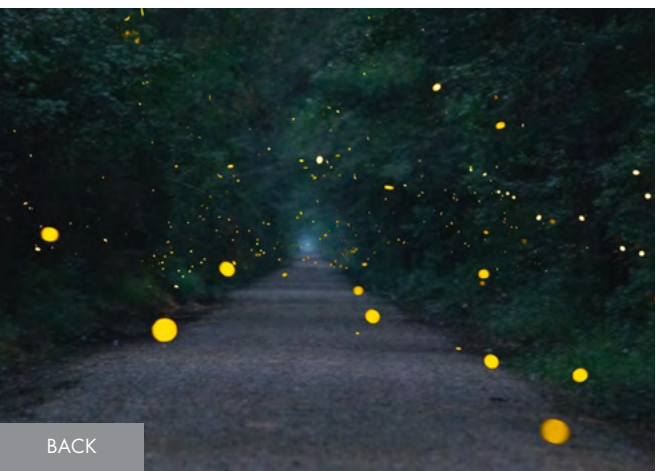




# BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

#BIGTHICKET





Big Thicket Association  
700 North Street, Suite 79  
Beaumont, Texas 77701

## BIG THICKET BULLETIN

*published quarterly by*  
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)

Neches River Flood Planning Group  
[www.nechesfloodplanning.org](http://www.nechesfloodplanning.org)

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

Sierra Club Golden Triangle Group  
[www.sierraclub.org/texas/golden-triangle](http://www.sierraclub.org/texas/golden-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  
[tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/village-creek](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/village-creek)

## 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



  
**BIG THICKET**  
ASSOCIATION  
PARTNER IN PRESERVATION