

BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 157



BIG THICKET
ASSOCIATION
PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

START >

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2023
 JANUARY
 FEBRUARY
 MARCH

3

A Message from the President »



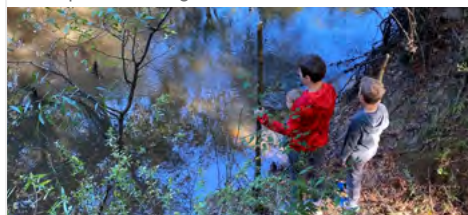
4

A Message from the Executive Director »



5

Photo Contest: Scenes from the Big Thicket, People in the Big Thicket »



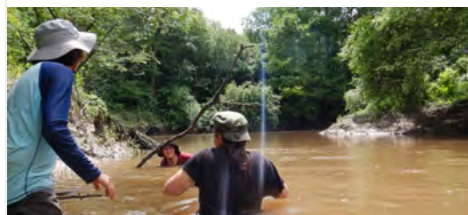
6

Springtime in the Preserve »



7

Thicket of Diversity Accomplishments, 2022 »



9

Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, Year In Review, 2022 »



11

Explore Your Thicket: 6th Annual Super Bowl Sunday Hike »



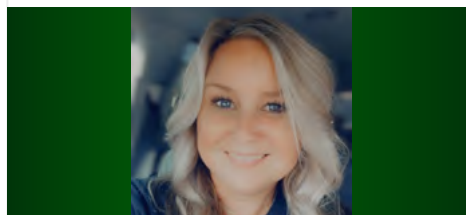
12

Hiking – Pitcher Plant Trail »



14

Welcome Cindy Black »



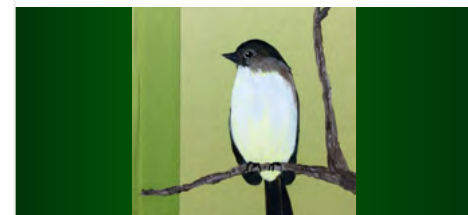
15

BTA welcomes Chief Captain Timothy Wynkoop »



16

Eastern Phoebe »



17

Remembering Judith Aronow »



18

Save the Dates »



A Message from the President

John Stafford, BTA director and board president

Greetings and Happy New Year to Friends and Members of BTA!

This quarter will be very busy as we prepare a new season of Ivory Bill tours and plan the 10th annual Neches River Rally. The Rally event has moved to Saturday, May 6, again at LNVA's Salt Water Barrier on Bigner Rd in Beaumont. Registration opens March 15th.

We expect paddlers will have another great time on the Cooks Lake to Scatterman Paddling Trail with assistance from numerous volunteers, Big Thicket National Preserve staff, Westbrook NROTC group and of course, our fabulous outfitter, Gerald Cerda of Big Thicket Outfitters. RESERVE your kayak/canoe early as quantities are limited. We anticipate new and returning sponsors and exhibits as well as our famous hamburger lunch. Paddlers will receive T-shirts and goodie bags as part of their registration fee. Adult paddlers will also receive a complimentary 2023 voting membership.

Our annual Big Thicket Day Celebration and General Membership meeting is scheduled for October 7th, one week earlier than in past years.

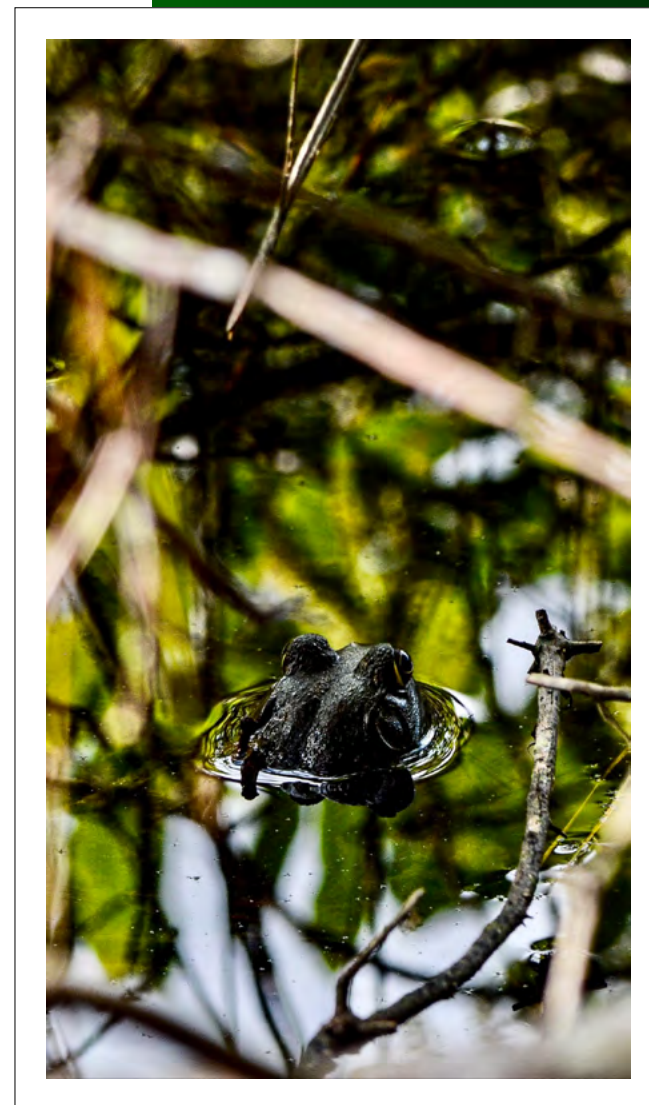
Our free Environmental Education programs continue to be in great demand with hundreds of students and many new schools (public, charter and home) represented due to efforts of Dir. Jennie Knapp and her volunteers.

Our Neches River Adventures under leadership of Capt. Bruce Walker and newly hired Chief Captain Tim Wynkoop has been very busy preparing the Ivory Bill for another year of service for school groups, tours and private charters. Public tours will resume March 25th and are enjoyed by all as they visit the Big Thicket National Preserve and enjoy seeing wildlife and beautiful scenery.

The Big Thicket National Preserve in association with BTA and many other partners held three wonderful events - one each in December, January and February - to plant a mixture of native grasses and longleaf pine seedlings as the park continues to restore native longleaf pine forest. The Preserve staff were most appreciative.

BTA's membership committee has been very active investigating new 'perks' for members and planning outings for both members and non-members later this year. Stay tuned.

My personal thanks to our many sponsors and supporters, and to BTA board members for their commitment and hours of service to BTA. We appreciate all you do.



*Eyes on the Big Thicket - Katy Hambright,
BTA Director*

A Message from the Executive Director

Diane Thompson, BTA Executive Director

The Big Thicket National Preserve is restoring the longleaf pine savanna ecosystem, one seedling at a time. Using a greenhouse Randy Beehn donated, the Park Service can grow native grasses all summer and then offers three planting days in the winter for partners and volunteers to come and help plant them. The first day of planting was December 10, 2022, followed by MLK day and President’s Day in 2023. On December 10, approximately 5,000 Little Blue Stem and Blue Stem grass plugs were planted. Then on MLK Day 7,500 Blue Stem grass plugs were planted by over 100 volunteers. Big Thicket Association was thrilled to be a partner for these events, and to assist in the planting of these seedlings.

The longleaf pines and native grasses are dependent on surface fires to prevent other species from growing into the canopy. The park service will periodically do prescribed burns for this reason. The non-native species burn off and the native species remain. A longleaf pine ecosystem is home to high plant diversity. The goal is to have the habitat restored which was decimated by timber companies years ago. Another goal is to bring back red cockaded woodpeckers to the Big Thicket by restoring their longleaf pine habitat. The Big Thicket National Preserve will bring in Red Cockaded woodpeckers from another location and introduce them to the restored habitat when it is mature enough to support them and their young. It is the hope that the woodpeckers decide to stay and make the Big Thicket their home again.

If you’ve never been to a planting day, you will learn quickly what a dibble bar is and how to use it to plant seedlings. It is rewarding work to plant these seedlings in this beautiful place, the Big Sandy Creek Unit, and imagine one day when the trees and grasses reach maturity. You reach the realization that you are preparing the Big Thicket for future generations of plants, animals, and visitors to enjoy. Please plan to join us in helping the Park Service next year on one or all three of these planting days.



Native grasses in greenhouse – Diane Thompson



Grass plug prep – Diane Thompson



Ready to plant – Johnny Thompson



Dibble bars – Diane Thompson



Sierra Club, Planting Day



Photo Contest Winner
REBEKAH FOSTER

PHOTO CONTEST: Scenes from the Big Thicket, People in the Big Thicket

Big Thicket Association is pleased to announce the winner of our quarterly photo contest, "Scenes from the Big Thicket, People in the Big Thicket." Rebekah Foster submitted her winning photograph of children enjoying a hike on the Kirby Nature Trail at Village Creek in the Big Thicket National Preserve. Rebekah will receive four free passes for a cruise on the Ivory Bill.

Our next quarterly photo contest theme will be "Scenes from the Big Thicket, Flowering Plants." Watch Big Thicket Association's website in early April for information about entering this fun contest!

Springtime in the Preserve

Megan Urban, Chief of Interpretation and Education,
Big Thicket National Preserve

Spring is a time for renewal, more flowers, and an upswing of visitors to Big Thicket National Preserve. During the first half of April, many of the visitors are looking for the flowering pitcher plants. And because of that increased interest, we offer multiple ranger-led interpretive walks so visitors can not only see them, but also learn more about these fascinating carnivorous plants. In addition to our ranger-led walks, you can also explore springtime in the preserve by going on one of our paddle programs.

During February, March and April, come check out the student art show at the Visitor Center. This year's theme is "People of the Park." The artwork highlights all of the ways people interact with Big Thicket, from hiking on Kirby to paddling on the waterways. The variety of the artwork is a sight to be seen!

Junior Ranger Day is a fun day for the whole family, where kids and adults alike learn more about the different careers found at Big Thicket! There will be hands-on activities for everyone to engage with the different types of rangers at Big Thicket. There will be a food truck and American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters on-site.

Find general information about Big Thicket National Preserve at our website (www.nps.gov/bith) or call the preserve visitor center at 409-951-6700. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with our social media tag #bigthicketnps.



Scott Sharaga/NPS

Thicket of Diversity Accomplishments, 2022

Mary C. Johnston, BTA director, Thicket of Diversity chair

The Thicket of Diversity (ToD), a biological inventory project, operates under the Big Thicket Association (BTA). In 2022 two research projects were completed and outreach through publications and presentations was conducted. ToD projects are performed with penalty monies from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality enforcement actions.

Dr. Daniel Bennett of Stephen F. Austin State University and Dr. John Pascarella of Sam Houston State University documented 127 species of bees with 94 as new to the preserve. Graduate student Archie Saul published *"The Bees of Two Sites in the BTNP, Texas with a consideration of the effects of a rare flooding event"*.

Alison Tarter, Southern Region Climate Center, Texas A&M University, collaborated with Dr. Astrid Schwalb, Texas State University, to research mussels. 32 species were verified. Tarter presented at the Freshwater Mussel Conservation Society's symposium. In March, *Hydrobiologia* published, *"Impact of extreme climatic events on unionid mussels in a subtropical river basin."* It was co-written by Tarter; Schwalb; Neil B. Ford, University of Texas at Tyler; and Daniel E. Symonds of Stantec Consulting, and Daniel F. Ford of Edge Engineering and Science. The study looked at the impacts of droughts, flooding, and salt-water intrusion and concluded that protecting wetlands is crucial to protect freshwater mussels and the ecosystem services they provide.



ToD1 *Cyclonaias nodulata*



ToD2 Collecting mussels

All shared by Allison Tarter, lead mussel researcher



ToD3 Tarter identifies freshwater mussels

All shared by Allison Tarter, lead mussel researcher

The North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences began their survey of the leeches of the BTNP. Dr. Bronwyn Williams, Research Curator of Non-molluscan Invertebrates, is eagerly at the helm after the retirement of the project's lead researcher. Megan McCuller, Collections Manager of Non-molluscan Invertebrates, and Jean Im, DigIn technician, joined Bronwyn in BTNP this fall. In spite of the drought-like conditions, they documented a minimum of five leech species.

Robert Laroche and Dr. Scott Egan of Rice University and Dr. Daniel Duran of Rowan University, New Jersey were awarded funds to initiate "Exploring Tiger Beetle Diversity Associated with Salt Domes Across East Texas."

Longtime ToD researcher, Dr. Scott Solomon, was the keynote speaker for Big Thicket Day in October. Solomon is an Associate Teaching Professor at Rice University and a Research Associate at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History. He has conducted multiple surveys of ants and teaches an annual course using the Big Thicket as an outdoor learning lab. His students utilized the housing at Saratoga's Big Thicket Field Research Station Learning Center. Post Covid, the Field Research Station experienced an uptick in users with a total of over 600 overnight stays.

A Sour Lake Historical Tour was presented for the deaf conservation work crew staying at the Field Research Station. An interpreter and food were provided by the Lions Club of Sour Lake.

The Thicket of Diversity was further disseminated through exhibits at community events. A Wildflower slideshow created from photographs by Alec Dyer was posted for public sharing on Youtube.

To see a wealth of information on Big Thicket science, go to www.thicketofdiversity.org.

Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, Year In Review, 2022

Mary C. Johnston, BTA director

Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust supporters have a passion for quality stewardship of the Big Thicket and its unique resources. In 2022 the Trust experienced an active year.

Three additional acres across from the Kirby Nature Trail were acquired. The pine plantation on the property was thinned. The Dogwood Trail 39-acre property east of Woodville was transferred to Texas A&M Forest Service. A Texas Parks and Wildlife Trail Grant and generosity of donors enabled the initial purchase. The Texas Forest Service will rehabilitate the trail, manage forest resources, and provide educational programs.

The Trust was a sponsor of the annual longleaf pine tree and understory plantings in the Big Sandy Unit of the Preserve.

The Trust partnered to promote conservation. Exhibits were hosted at Champions for Nature at Ford Park, Big Thicket Day on the Neches, and at a viewing of "Deep in the Heart" at the Jefferson Theater.

The Trust held two investments, a Stewardship Defense Fund and an Operating Endowment, through the Foundation For Southeast Texas. Thanks to donors' generosity in 2022, both accounts grew.

In 2001 the Texas Legislature designated part of US 69 as the



photo shared by Ellen Buchanan



Thursday, November 10, 2022 Kim Brent/Beaumont Enterprise

Big Thicket National Preserve Parkway. The designation benefits the Preserve by attracting visitor attention. In 2022, after years of collaborative efforts, the Parkway’s future erupted into a heartbreaking situation. TxDOT, under new local leadership, now intends to essentially clear cut the median and lane buffer trees on a 14-mile stretch from FM 1003 to Warren, citing safety concerns.

A coalition of groups including National Parks Conservation Association, The Conservation Fund, Texas Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Alliance, The Big Thicket Biosphere Reserve, the Big Thicket Association, and the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust collaborated on providing comments to TxDOT’s mitigation plan and environmental assessment. These same groups as well as Southeast Texas Clean Air and Water are continually working to change TxDOT’s mind on cutting the trees and destroying the Parkway. Citizens have written 3,500 letters, attended County Commissioners Court meetings, commented in person to the TxDOT Commission, protested, and picketed. Many thanks to the Tyler County Commissioners Court for passing a Resolution stating they wanted the trees retained.

TxDOT will soon begin removing trees on Hwy 69 for utility relocation. Median tree removal will be later in the year. The Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust and coalition partners will continue to bring this issue to the forefront of the public’s attention in 2023 and continue the valuable work to Save the Big Thicket Parkway!



Explore Your Thicket: 6th Annual Super Bowl Sunday Hike

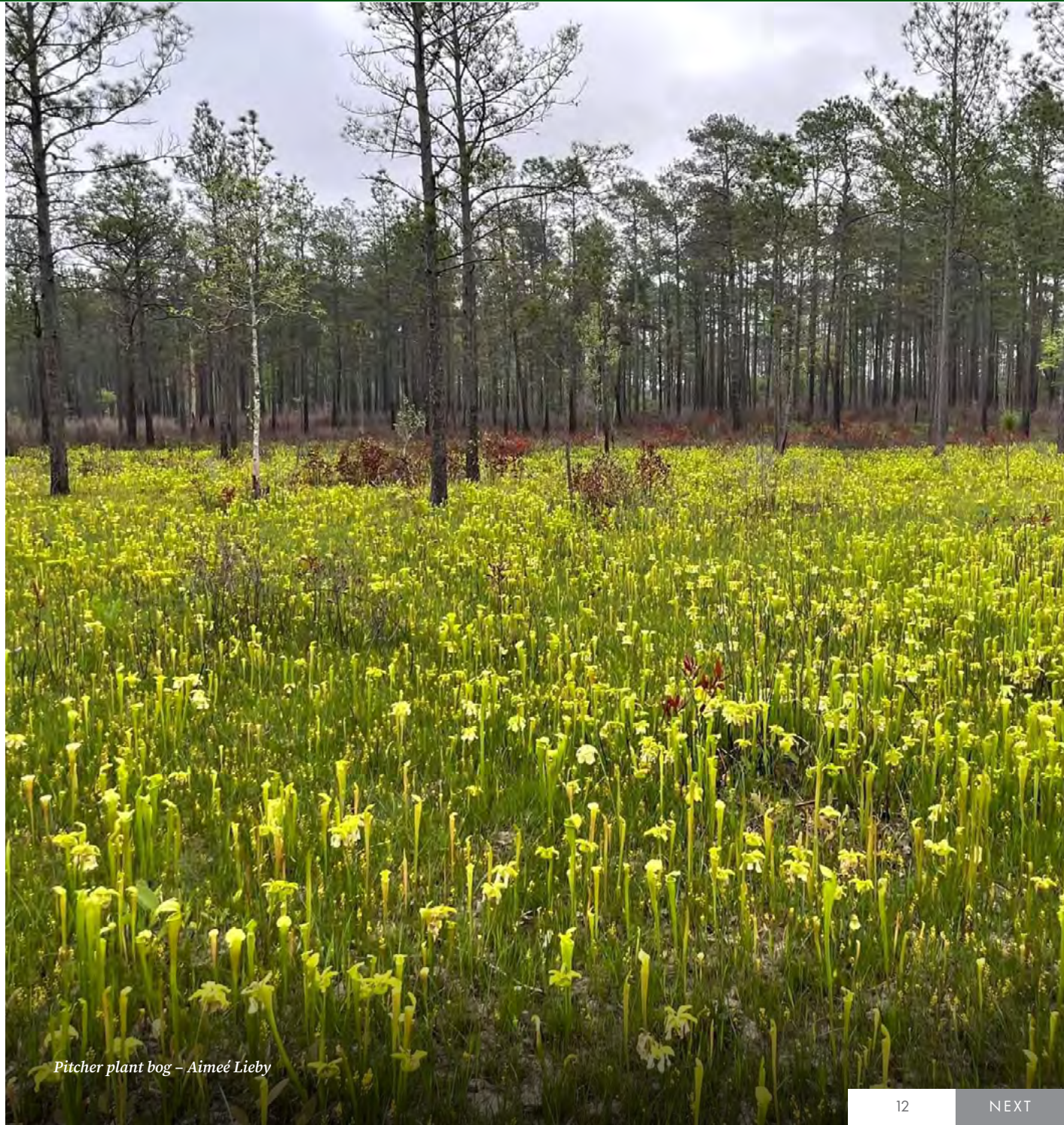
The BTA Membership Committee co-sponsored our annual Super Bowl Sunday Hike with the Sabine Neches Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist. Leaders of the hike included BTA Directors Bruce Walker, *Randy Beehn, and Charles Smith. Hikers met at the Staley Cabin, Kirby Nature Trailhead. This trail has three loop options, ranging from 1.5 miles to 2.5 miles and passes through several plant communities, from baygalls to cypress sloughs to the riparian zone along the trail and to the Village Creek iron bridge. Our first Super Bowl Sunday Hike was held in February 2018. This year we had 35 participants sign up for the hike. *Randy Beehn is also the local president of the Sabine Neches Chapter of TMN.

Hiking – Pitcher Plant Trail

Aimeé Lieby, BTA director

The Big Thicket National Preserve is a region positively bursting with ecological diversity. One of the most unique aspects of this biodiversity is the variety of carnivorous plants that make their home in the fertile soils of the Big Thicket. In fact, four unique and fascinating types of carnivorous plants can be found in the Thicket and the Pitcher Plant Trail is the perfect place to spot most of them.

The Pitcher Plant Trail is a one-mile loop into the longleaf pine forest that intersects with the Turkey Creek Trail. The start of the Pitcher Plant Trail is inviting and fully accessible with a lovely paved path and wooden boardwalk. This boardwalk takes you out over the pitcher plant bog and provides ample opportunities to stop and view the plants. Pause a moment to look for the “pitcher-esque” pitcher plants throughout the bog. The plants are visible through much of the year, though spring is the best time for seeing them in bloom. Gaze long enough and you may see an insect land in the mouth of the pitcher, the first step on its final journey to becoming plant lunch! The



Pitcher plant bog – Aimeé Lieby



bog is also a great place to observe sundews. What sundews lack in height, they make up for in flair! Look for small firework-like plants on the floor of the bog and you have found the sundews. Sundews are also slightly more dramatic in how they digest their prey, grabbing it with their tentacles and slowly dissolving the insect. Butterworts are the third type of carnivorous plant found on the trail and can be difficult to find due to their diminutive size, so look carefully! In addition to these unique plants, the Pitcher Plant Trail plays host to a wide variety of other flora and fauna to enjoy.

Regardless of the time of year, the Pitcher Plant Trail makes for a pleasant and user-friendly excursion into the Big Thicket. Plan your visit today and remember to “take only memories, leave only footprints.”

For more information, check out:

<https://www.nps.gov/bith/learn/nature/carnivorous-plants.htm>

Sundew – Aimeé Lieby



Cindy Black

Welcome Cindy Black

Big Thicket Association is pleased to announce the addition of our new office administrator, Cindy Black. We are thrilled to have her join our team. She is a small business owner of Sign Gypsies Lumberton/Beaumont. She comes to us with previous experience with several different non-profit organizations. She is looking forward to all of the upcoming BTA events and is already working on them! Please welcome her when you see her.

BTA welcomes Chief Captain Timothy Wynkoop

Bruce Walker, BTA director, NRIB Committee Chairman

BTA's Neches River Adventures (NRIB) Committee announces the creation of a new contractor's position for the Ivory Bill. The BTA Board of Directors approved the "Chief Captain" proposal for filling this new position in January and Captain Timothy (Tim) Wynkoop began his new duties on February 1st.

Captain Wynkoop began serving aboard the Ivory Bill in September 2018 as a deckhand. He renewed his USCG Merchant Mariner Credentials in June 2021 and has become a valued crewmember, serving as captain, deckhand, or docent. When an open position aboard the Ivory Bill needs filling, Tim can be depended upon. He has an extensive background regarding vessel operations, maintenance, and our NRIB programs. For more background information about Captain Wynkoop, see the "Meet the Captain" article in the 2021 BTA Bulletin #150.

<https://www.bigthicket.org/img/btabulletin150.pdf>



Chief Captain Timothy Wynkoop – Captain Bruce Walker

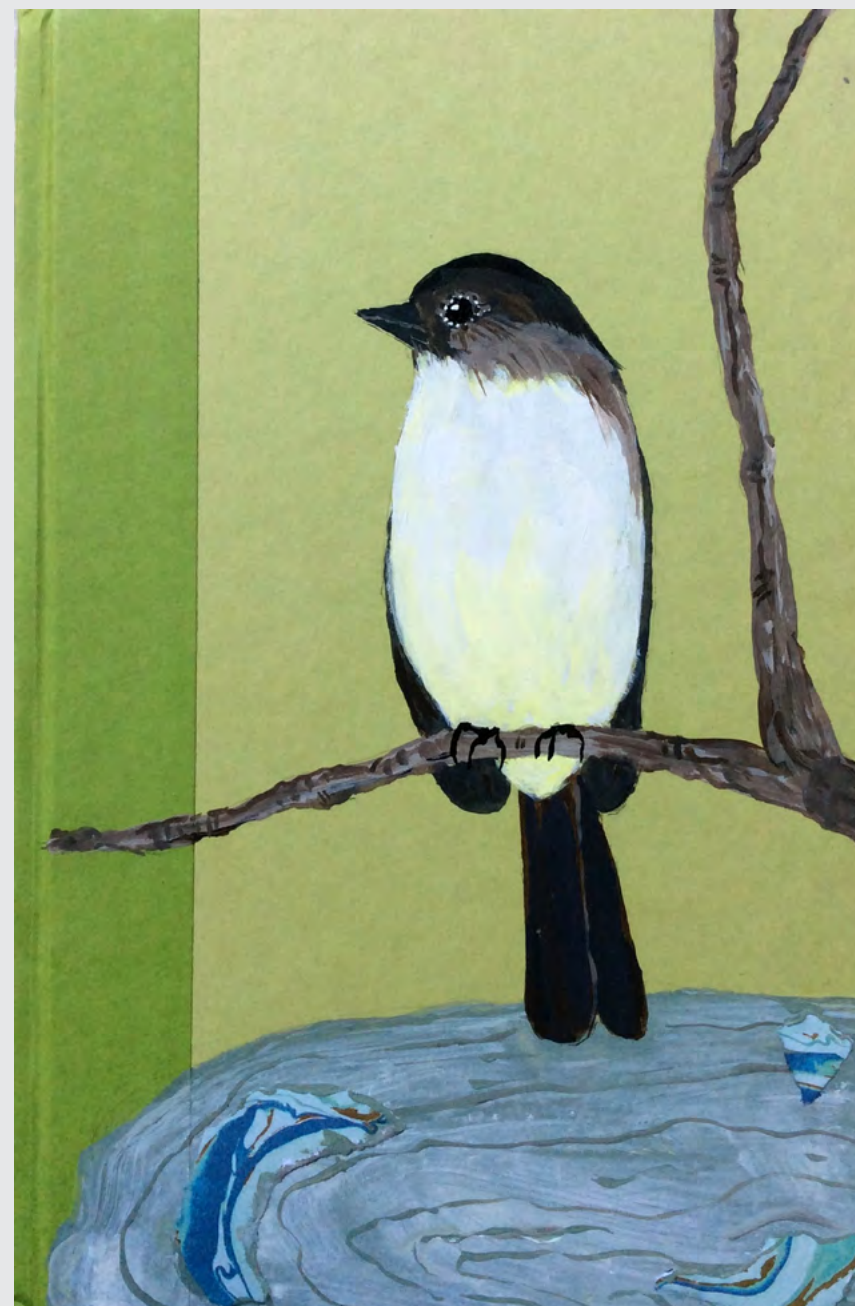
Eastern Phoebe

Phoebe H. Dishman, BTA director, Bulletin editor

When I was a small girl my godmother Phoebe Brown Bell gave me a book called *The Friendly Phoebe*. In this book I met a bird, quiet and quick of wing, adroit in hunting insects, especially around waterways. School days brought the revelation that Phoebe was a Greek goddess. Soon after the dawn of a new century came the news that the planet Saturn boasts a small, skull-shaped, cratered moon at the furthest reach of its rings, orbiting in the opposite direction from all the other Saturn moons. Phoebe, of course. Now comes Gary Clark, whose bird-lore I've long enjoyed. In a recent article he wrote:

A little goddess of the moon sits in a tree outside my study window every year about this time, bobbing its tail down slowly—then up quickly. This is the bird called an eastern phoebe. And rather than an ancient Greek goddess who ruled the moon as well as intellect, the drab little bird lacks the radiant aura of its Phoebe namesake. Instead, the phoebe has a lackluster coat with a chocolate-colored head, tail, wings, olive-brown back and bone-white underside ... The only goddess aspects of this bird are its black eyes glistening like obsidian jewels. But the bird at least behaves regally ... swooping gracefully into the air to grab a flying insect. The bird's name is derived from its tuneful but quick two-syllable call notes—sounding like "FEE-BEE." Perhaps a bygone bird-watcher told people on a field trip, "There's a fee-bee," and someone steeped in Greek mythology wrote down Phoebe.

Two days after reading Gary's article I noticed a phoebe working my wintry backyard. Drab? Some might say so. On the other hand regal, with distinguished dark head, dashing white breast, black eyes glistening like obsidian jewels. Lacking in radiant aura? Ask the huge smile on my face. Like the phoebe, the Big Thicket has that certain something for those she calls: Birders, botanists, biologists. Mystics, mycologists, musicologists. Wordsmiths and wanderers. Artists and arborists. Explorers and educators. Poets and preservationists. The Thicket speaks to all.



Eastern Phoebe – Isabelle Scurry Chapman

I N M E M O R Y



Judith Aronow, 1926 - 2023

Judith Aronow

1926 - 2023

BTA remembers longtime BTA volunteer and board director Judith Aronow, PhD., who died at age 96 on January 20, 2023, in San Marcos, Texas. Wife to Saul and mother of three, she was an educator, birder, hiker, sportswoman, churchwoman, appreciator of the arts and sciences, life-long reader and learner. Quoting from her obituary as published by the Beaumont Enterprise: "Judith believed in a life of service in many areas of her life -spiritually, environmentally, and civically ... Environmentally, she was involved in the formation of the Beaumont chapter of the Sierra Club, serving in leadership roles at the local and state level of the Sierra Club for many decades. Additionally, Judith was in leadership positions with the Big Thicket Association and later participated in the San Marcos River Foundation. She also had a volunteer advisory role with transportation planning in Austin."





SAVE THE DATES

Neches River Adventures

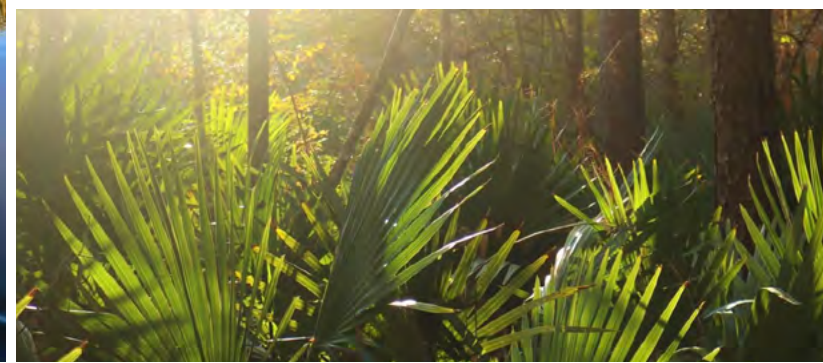
Tour the Neches River's backwater channels into the Big Thicket National Preserve and the Port of Beaumont. Collier's Ferry Park, 5390 Pine Street, Beaumont, TX 77703. Public tours resume March 2023. Private charters and school tours continue. Fees apply. Check online scheduling at www.nechesriveradventures.org for details.

10th annual Neches River Rally

Saturday, May 6, at LNVA's Salt Water Barrier on Bigner Rd in Beaumont.

Registration opens March 15th. RESERVE your kayak/canoe early as quantities are limited. See BTA website for details.

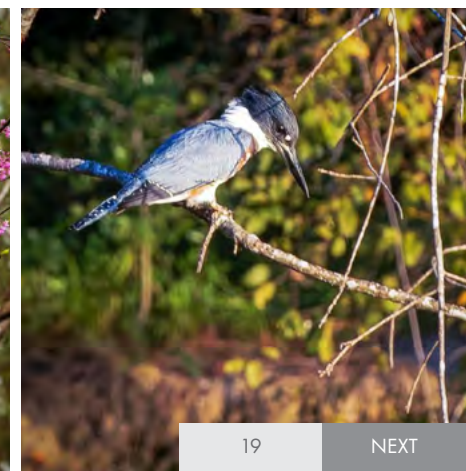
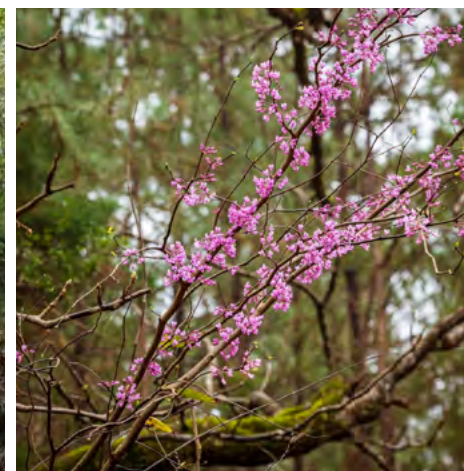




BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

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Web Sites

Big Thicket Association
www.bigthicket.org

Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust
www.bigthickettrust.org

Big Thicket National Preserve
www.nps.gov/bith

Conservation Fund
www.conservationfund.org

Gulf States Mycological Society
www.gsmco.org

National Audubon Society
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org
www.houstonaudubon.org

National Parks Conservation Association
www.npca.org

Native Plant Society of Texas
www.npsot.org

Nature Conservancy
www.nature.org/texas

Neches River Flood Planning Group
www.nechesfloodplanning.org

Outdoor Nature Club, Houston
www.outdoornatureclub.org

Sierra Club Golden Triangle Group
www.sierraclub.org/texas/golden-triangle

Texas Black Bear Alliance
texasblackbear.weebly.com

Texas Conservation Alliance
www.TCAtexas.org

Texas Master Naturalist Association,
Sabine Neches Chapter
www.txmn.org/sabine

Village Creek State Park
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.

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