



# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE **142**

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## BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE NEWS

### LEADERSHIP IN THE PRESERVE

by Jason A. Ginder, Chief of Interpretation and Education, NPS

On April 25, Superintendent Wayne Prokopetz welcomed the 2019 class of Leadership Southeast Texas (LSET) to the Big Thicket National Preserve. LSET participants spent the day learning about the public lands in our community and the federal and state governments' role in managing these important public spaces. National Park Service staff welcomed US Congressman Brian Babin of the 36th Congressional District along with speakers Lanie Brown, Aaron Friar of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and Ellen Buchanan, President of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust. LSET is a regional educational leadership 501(c)(3) Texas non-profit charitable corporation, serving the nine-county region of Southeast Texas. Their mission is to promote better understanding of the nine counties they serve.



## SCIENCE CAFÉ: INFORMATION, AND TRANSFORMATION

by Phoebe H. Dishman

Some years ago I was invited to hear Michael Black's presentation at a Science Café hosted by the Thicket of Diversity. This outreach to the general public proved magical for me, opening my eyes to the treasure we call the Big Thicket National Preserve. Here's my report from that night:

Mysterious, magical, tucked away, teeming with life. Thus did the young man describe the Big Thicket.

He's helping with a Thicket of Diversity species inventory.

With 300 kinds of birds, 1,000 kinds of flowers, myriad mushrooms, shiploads of salamanders, loads of lichens, swarms of snakes, tons of turtles, streams of slime molds, floods of fungi—well, you get the idea—there's plenty to count.

His particular eye, trained first in fine art and now biology, is for the small things. His photographs were exquisite, his comments simple and soft spoken, from a heart full for his subject.

He was chasing a frog, which hopped in a log, in whose interior he found: bouquets of glowing pearls! Tiny fungi they were, stunning beauty hidden, till the accident of his intrusion, the skillful application of his camera.

He described one incident in which he'd been on the ground for hours, trying for the perfect photographic rendering of some small growing thing. Turning to pack up his gear, he beheld a face, regarding him. It was a copperhead snake, motionless, inscrutable, well within striking distance. He wondered whether to attempt a mighty spring out of range, or take its picture. He took its

picture. A portrait I'll not soon forget. That chalk-pale skin! Those cold eyes! Those non-lips!

The team doing the inventory have found species not seen for years, and others new to science. Evidently all you have to do is scoop up a net-full of slimy leaf debris, spread it out, and look. In that net-full could be 100 kinds of critters.

Some of the colors he's seen in the Thicket are so rich, so saturated, that there's no way even the most sophisticated camera can do them justice. And then the light changes, the color disappears ... I scrawled my notes that night on both sides of a business card, all I had in my purse. And now I offer my findings to you.

## EDUCATIONAL GRANTS IN THE BIG THICKET

### *Kountze Intermediate Science Fair*

by Mary C. Johnston

Kountze Intermediate School hosted Science Fair 2019 for all 4th- through 6th-grade students. The annual event is organized under the leadership of Kountze Independent School District Principal Connie Joubert; and science teachers, Maurisa French, Danielle Krapf, and Karen Key. The Grand Prize Winner is Kaigen Parker, 6th Grade, for "Which Water Works." Kountze High School teachers, Leitha Gunter, Tresha Malone, and Cathy Johnston along with Curriculum Director Shane Reyenga were on hand to select the winners in the exhibition. Alexander Halbrook from the National Park Service, and Ellen Buchanan; President of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, also served as guest judges. The Big Thicket National Preserve, the Thicket of Diversity, Entergy Charitable Foundation, and the National Environmental Education Foundation were credited in exhibits. The event was a source of pride for all participants.



## HOUSTON ZOO VOLUNTEERISM

### *HOUSTON ZOO – SPRING BREAK CLEAN UP*

by Morgan Brandenburg, Community Volunteer Ambassador, NPS

On the weekend of March 9, nine teen and two adult volunteers from the Houston Zoo Crew worked with the Big Thicket National Preserve Resource Management staff on clean up efforts in the Big Sandy Unit. Together they cleared vegetation from reintroduction plots of Texas Trailing Phlox. Thanks to the more than 150-service-hours of the Zoo Crew, the Texas Trailing Phlox will receive much needed sunlight to grow and reproduce in the area. In addition, the Zoo Crew worked to clear overgrown woody vegetation from the pitcher plant bog in the Turkey Creek Unit. Between their two-day clearing efforts, students joined the interpretation staff for a canoe trip down Village Creek. The Zoo Crew picked up trash at the put-in location and along the 7-mile creek trail paddled that day. Throughout the year, amazing groups like the Houston Zoo Crew help Big Thicket National Preserve accomplish its missions.



## BTA'S IVORY BILL NEWS

### MEET CHIEF CAPTAIN BILL KLEIN

by Bruce Walker, Executive Director

Bill has been captaining the Ivory Bill for seven years. He became interested in serving when Kathryn and I went to a Kiwanis meeting in Orange, bringing a BTA Neches River Adventures presentation as their weekly program. Bill had been captaining his own offshore boat for a number of years so it was not too much of a challenge for him to respond positively to our requests for a licensed captain.

Retiring from banking after 35 years serving in local banks, Bill joined a small software company as CFO. He spent many weekends fishing from his own craft, The Lagniappe, or serving on the Ivory Bill. He finally retired from full time work to enjoy more time on the water.

Although volunteering is easy for Bill, being on the water has added a level of expertise to his service. He served on the Orange City Council for a number of years. During his terms, his dream of public access to the Sabine River was completed. The Orange Boat Ramp has become a center for individual boaters and fisherman as well as professional fishing tournaments, boat races, festivities, etc.

Bill's favorite part of working with the BTA's Neches River Adventures program is captaining young people who have not had the opportunity to be on the water. One of many highlights was captaining for a group of visually challenged people on a tour of the Neches. He was amazed at what they could "see."

Getting Captain Klein involved in the early stages (November 2013) of our environmental education classes and the eco-history river tours has been one of the program's best finds. Bill not only captains the Ivory Bill, he also serves on the NRIB Committee and is our "Chief" Captain. He is our "go to" advisor and oversees the Ivory Bill's maintenance and service to keep the vessel in its best working order while providing a safe "floating classroom" for our students of all ages.

Whether it's offshore or river fishing or driving the Ivory Bill, any day on the water is a good day for Bill.



## BTA NECHES RIVER RALLY

### GET READY PADDLERS

On Sept. 7, the Sixth Annual Neches River Rally, on the Cooks Lake to Scatterman Paddling Trail, Neches River is open for registration now.

A traditional kick-off to fall, the rally is a float trip into the beautiful wildlife refuge of the Big Thicket National Preserve in Southeast Texas.

The trail covers the 4-mile Cooks Lake Paddling Trail in a family-friendly opportunity to experience the biological diversity of the Preserve.

A seemingly short-trail which is an all-day adventure where Cooks Lake and Scatterman Lake offer much to explore.

Experience the beautiful cypress/ tupelo forests making any modern paddler feel like an early explorer yet just on the edge of civilization.

This loop-style trail eliminates shuttling issues since there is only one access point.

Adult participants receive a complimentary non-voting membership for the year 2019-2020 and a beautiful BTA luggage tag.

Registration does not include boat rental. For boat rentals, call Big Thicket Outfitters at 409-786-1884.

For further information, contact: Bruce Walker at [director@bigthicket.org](mailto:director@bigthicket.org).



## MAXINE JOHNSTON, LAMAR UNIVERSITY GRAND MARSHALL

Maxine Johnston, former director of the Mary and John Gray Library and tireless advocate for conservation of the Big Thicket, has been chosen as the 2019 Lamar University Homecoming Parade Grand Marshal on Sept. 28, 2019. "Maxine's contributions to our community, and to Lamar University, because of her service as our librarian for so many years, are extraordinary," said President Ken Evans. "We're grateful to her and hope that others come to understand our grand marshal's leadership and many accomplishments that benefit us all." Stay tuned for the next BTA Bulletin with pictures from the Maxine Johnston Grand Marshal extravaganza.



# THE NATURE CONSERVANCY NEWS

## Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary, Silsbee

by Wendy J. Ledbetter, The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy conducted prescribed burns on 750 acres of the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary in February and March. Additional burning of Sandylands and the Big Thicket Bogs & Pinelands Preserve is scheduled for later spring/summer.

Texas trailing phlox surveys were completed on the preserve. This endangered plant is found on the sandy upland soils of longleaf pine forests. Numbers of the plant continue to increase with the application of restoration activities, including prescribed fire.

The Nature Conservancy hosted a Groundcover Field Day for participants of the Texas Longleaf Taskforce. Landowners, Master Naturalists and resource professionals spent the day discussing management strategies for optimizing native groundcover that benefit wildlife and function of the forest system.

Henslow Sparrow has been added to the bird checklist for the Sandyland Preserve. The mammals, amphibian and reptile, plant and bird lists have been refreshed for the preserve. Copies are available at the trailhead registration box. Bird surveys are being conducted in May. We continue to hear Northern Bobwhite calling on the preserve-always a good sound!

Employees of Colonial Pipeline participated in a corporate volunteer workday and completed marking and trail maintenance on the floodplain trail.

Photographs include: Alan Shadow with NRCS demonstrates the value of native ground cover and soil/water retention at the groundcover field day, photo-credit Wendy J. Ledbetter and Texas Trailing Phlox in bloom, photo-credit credit Kristin Leger.



# NPS NEW OUTREACH PROGRAM MANAGER

## Megan Urban Joins the Big Thicket NP Team

Megan Urban has recently joined the interpretation staff at Big Thicket as the new Community Outreach and Volunteer Program Manager. She moved from northern New Mexico where she worked as the education technician at Fort Union National Monument. Urban also worked at Pecos National Historical Park, Hoover Dam, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, and the Alaska Public Lands Information Center. Growing up she has many memories exploring Bandelier National Monument with her family and went to a boarding school in Michigan for high school where she spent many days in ecology class learning about Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Her park experience opened her eyes to the park ranger career. She, her husband and two boys are excited to move to a new part of the country and are excited to explore this area. Some of the things they love to do as a family is going camping in their travel trailer, visiting as many national park sites as possible, hiking, and being on the water.



# BIG THICKET NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST NEWS

## PINE ISLAND BAYOU CLEAN UP

by Ellen Buchanan, Trust President

The Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust project for recovery and resilience after Hurricane Harvey partnered with the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF), Toyota Motor North America, the Big Thicket National Preserve, Entergy Charitable Foundation, and the Kountze Independent School District.

NEEF President and CEO, Meri-Margaret Deoudes, presented a \$20,000 check to Ellen Buchanan, President of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust for cleanup of a 7.5 mile segment of Pine Island Bayou from the Hwy 69 bridge to the Neches River.

Through the services of local entrepreneur Gerald Cerda, the Trust removed refrigerators, freezers, barrels and broken docks as well as smaller trash and debris from the bayou waters and banks in Jefferson and Hardin Counties.

Sponsor Toyota partnered with NEEF to award a restoration and resilience grant to the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust in the Big Thicket National Preserve, a Signature Site.

“By supporting long-term recovery, we aim to build the resiliency of these lands over time.” Said Kevin Butt, Toyota Motor North America’s general manager of environmental sustainability,

Entergy also funded \$1,900 for complementary educational activities for Kountze ISD students to enhance environmental awareness and NEEF’s vision to actively use environmental knowledge to ensure the well-being of the earth and its people.

Kountze ISD High School students and 4th Graders participated in field trip activities and guided hikes on the Sundew and Kirby Nature Trails. Many thanks to the Every Kid in a Park Project funding, park rangers, and our volunteers.





## THICKET OF DIVERSITY NEWS

### 2018 Accomplishments of the Thicket of Diversity

by Mary C. Johnston

The Thicket of Diversity (ToD) project of the Big Thicket Association ambitiously strives to inventory every species in the Big Thicket region. 2018 was a productive year due to the conclusion of five multi-year research efforts.

Bees of the Big Thicket National Preserve (BTNP) were sampled by Dr. Daniel Bennett of Stephen F. Austin State University and Dr. John Pasarella of Sam Houston State University. Three thousand two hundred thirty-two specimens were mounted, labeled and archived and a voucher collection of identified bees assembled. Ninety-three species were represented with 67 of these as new records for the preserve and two as new state records.

Beginning in 2012, Dr. Thomas Powers of University of Nebraska- Lincoln and his team visited 70 sites to inventory nematodes or roundworms. Their study resulted in 1026 identified nematodes of which seven are currently being described as candidates for new species.

Dr. Scott Solomon and Dr. Tom Miller of Rice University have researched ants in the Big Thicket National Preserve since 2014. Three thousand one hundred fifty-two specimens were collected representing 33 different species. The research concluded that diversity, species, and proportion of native ants are higher inside versus outside

the preserve with distance from the edge. Non-native ants were found in every unit of the preserve

Crawfish research conducted by Dr. Zachary Loughman of West Liberty University in Virginia began in 2014. He collected 664 specimens and identified 13 species. Loughman presented locally to KHS students and made presentations nationally at various symposiums. He published a list of all crayfish (family Cambaridae) in the Southern United States.

Alison Tarter, a graduate student of Texas State University, researched the status of freshwater mussel biodiversity as part of her Master study program. Tarter compared older collections with 47 new sites in 7 units of the preserve. She analyzed results to determine if mussel species had been impacted by catastrophic flooding after Hurricane Harvey. Tarter inferred that major flooding had a severe impact on freshwater mussels, particularly on the regionally State Threatened Species, the Texas Pigtoe. Tarter was guided in her research by Astrid Schwalb, Ph.D., and Thon Hardy, Ph.D. of Texas State University.

For additional information contact Mary C. Johnston, [mathicket@aol.com](mailto:mathicket@aol.com), 757-288-0190.



## GOLDEN TRIANGLE SIERRA CLUB GROUP

The Executive Committee Members of the Golden Triangle Sierra Club manned an information table at the Earth Day 2019 at Lamar University on Monday, April 22. Pictured (left to right) is Vicki Fruge, Ellen Buchanan, Bo Baggs, and Eric Newby.



## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### **JUNE 18, TUESDAY**

Full Moon Night Hike (Almost Full) the nighttime world of the Big Thicket under a full moon. Locations vary and space is limited, call our visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

### **JUNE 22, SATURDAY**

Canoe Trip, 10 a.m., join park rangers on the waters of the preserve, casual and novice paddlers: canoes, PFDs, and paddles will be provided. Space is limited and locations vary, call visitor center 409-951-6700 to register.

### **JUNE 25, TUESDAY**

Canoe Trip, 10 a.m., join park rangers on the waters of the preserve, casual and novice paddlers: canoes, PFDs, and paddles will be provided. Space is limited and locations vary, call visitor center 409-951-6700 to register.

### **JUNE 29, SATURDAY**

Free Family Fishing Clinic on Village Creek on the Highway 327 boat ramp. Meet with Park Rangers and TPWD Certified Angler Ed. Instructors. It's National Fishing Week. Use some of the park gear or bring your own, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

### **JULY 6, TUESDAY**

Canoe Trip, 10 a.m., join park rangers on the waters of the preserve, casual and novice paddlers: canoes, PFDs, and paddles will be provided. Space is limited and locations vary, call visitor center 409-951-6700 to register.

**JULY, WEDNESDAYS** are Junior Ranger Days Kids ages 8 to 12 are invited to participate in fun educational activities from 9 to noon every Wednesday this month. Bring water, insect repellent, and sunscreen, and wear closed-toed athletic shoes and clothes that can get dirty.

**JULY 3:** Fishing Fun Learn about casting, knot-tying, and fish ID. Earn a Junior Angler certification.

**JULY 10:** Cryptic Critters Learn about the often-overlooked wildlife that in the Big Thicket.

**JULY 17:** Wilderness Survival for Kids. Basics of staying safe in the outdoors on a 1.7-mile walk on the Kirby Nature Trail, at Kirby Trailhead on FM 420, 2.5 miles east of the visitor center.

**JULY 24:** Wings over the Big Thicket Experience. Explore the world of flying animals.

**JULY 31:** Branching Out. Learn about plants on a 1-mile walk on the Sundew Trail. Meet at the Sundew Trail on CR 1910, about 7 miles north of the visitor center.

### **JUNE 16, TUESDAY**

Full Moon Night Hike the nighttime world of the Big Thicket under a full moon. Locations vary and space is limited, call our visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

### **JULY 25, THURSDAY**

Canoe Trip, 10 a.m., join park rangers on the waters of the preserve, casual and novice paddler: canoes, PFDs, and paddles will be provided. Space is limited and locations vary, so call visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

### **AUGUST 3, SATURDAY AND AUGUST 7, WEDNESDAY**

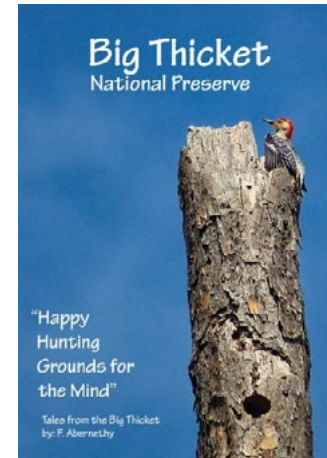
Canoe Trip, 10 a.m., join park rangers on the waters of the preserve, casual and novice paddler: canoes, PFDs, and paddles will be provided. Space is limited and locations vary, so call visitor center at 409-951-6700 to register.

### **NECHES RIVER ADVENTURES**

Boat tours on the Ivory Bill in the Big Thicket, register with the Big Thicket Association at (409) 651-5326 or [nechesriveradventures.org/public-trips/register-for-public-trips](https://nechesriveradventures.org/public-trips/register-for-public-trips).

## BIG THICKET MEMENTOS: NEW INSPIRATION

Get your new mementos! Over the past few months NPS staff have been working closely with Cindy Reed, the preserve's Western National Parks Association (WNPA) Park Store Manager, to enhance and refresh the sale items available at the visitor center. A collection of new post cards, magnets, stickers, and other park-specific items have been recently launched. Products highlighting Smokey Bear, wildfire prevention messages and other National Park Service collectibles have also been added. In the coming months, a new t-shirt design will also be released. WNPA is a non-profit park partner who has been providing interpretive and informational products to visitors in Big Thicket National Preserve since the 1980's. Proceeds from all park store sales support interpretive and educational operations in the preserve. WNPA supports more than 70 parks across the West, developing products, services, and programs that enrich the visitor experience.



## POLLINATORS BLOOM AT BIG THICKET

by *Matthew Berrones, The Student Conservation Association, NPS*

The Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center has over 20 native wildflowers blooming in a recently installed pollinator garden. In October 2018, a Student Conservation Association (SCA) volunteer crew assisted preserve staff in creating the pollinator garden. Their work consisted of building the border, tilling the soil with compost, and laying the landscape fabric followed by river rock and pine straw. The plants are south-central US native species adapted to cultivation, and good sources of nectar as well as larval hosts for pollinators. Pollinators include: Blanket flowers, Butterfly milkweed, Texas chocolate daisy, and Downy phlox attractive to bees, birds, butterflies, and other insects to carry pollen from one plant to another. With the current decline of pollinators, recognizing the value in creating habitat for pollinators is essential in maintaining native plant and insect species. Our hope is that our pollinator garden will provide a clear, real life example of the interdependent nature of valuable service that pollinators provide.

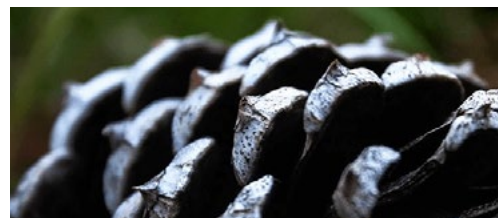
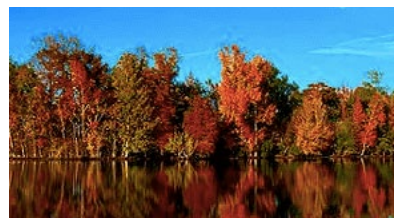




# BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

#BIGTHICKET





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

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

East Texas Black Bear Task Force  
[www.bbct.org](http://www.bbct.org)

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

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

National Audubon Society  
[www.goldentriangleadubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleadubon.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 Conservation Alliance  
[www.TCA.texas.org](http://www.TCA.texas.org)

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

