

The Bay City Nature Club's

Outdoor Outlook

Our purpose is to promote the observation and preservation of, and education about, wildlife and the environment.

2011 Meeting Schedule

Date	Program	Refreshments
09/13/11	Clint Pustejovsky on Snakes – Dispelling myths and fears	Francine Sanders/ Bettye Jo Lowry
10/11/11	Kathy and Gary Clark on TX Coastal Shorebirds	Eva Malina/ Helen Kassler
11/08/11	Karen McBride on China	Karen McBride/ Arlene Bennett
12/13/11	Betsy Terrel on MBNC Science Programs	All

Officers (subject to 9/13 Election)

President – Ginger Burlingame

Vice President – Francine Sanders

Secretary – Manie Matthews

Treasurer – Bettye Jo Lowry

Program Chair – Arlene Bennett

Newsletter Editors

Content – Karen Barrett

Photography – Dick Barrett

From the President's Perch...

I am honored and excited to be nominated to serve as your next President. One thing I'd like to achieve is more publicity for the Club Meetings and Adventures via newspapers and the marquee at the Courthouse. I will take on that job personally. There seemed to be a consensus that doorprizes should be discontinued...we all have too much "stuff" already!! However I refuse to discontinue refreshments which Bettye Jo has cheerfully already arranged. Another goal for all of us is increased membership. Without new members, we will literally just die away. Where are the young(er) folks who love Nature? Out there somewhere and it is our job to find and invite them. Arlene has arranged, as usual, outstanding programs for the coming year.

SNAKES ALIVE with Clint "the Snakeman" Pustejovsky is our September learning experience. If you are grossing out now, please relax. Mr. Pustejovsky is planning to dispel rumors and myths regarding our reptile friends (?). Parentheses mine. He says that snakes draw people like a magnet pulling steel. Even snakehaters can be curious. Like me and probably you. Be assured no venomous snakes allowed! "Clint the Snakeman" goes to children camps, schools, libraries, businesses and lots for birthday parties with his reptiles. I promise they will not be turned loose in the Service Center on September 13th, nor will we be standing on our chairs and screaming. I promise to actually touch one if you will too. How about it?

Oh and be sure and invite your friends. Maybe we'll all be surprised by who likes snakes.

HAPPY NEW CLUB YEAR!

Welcome back! After a long, hot summer, fall is eagerly anticipated. The “words” for this club year are... **get active!** We have a wonderful line-up of programs for the year, people expert in their field whose goal is education. They need to reach as many people as possible to justify their time and expense coming here. So get active and bring a friend or family member with you to our meetings. I’m bringing three. This is **essential** if we want to continue these programs!

After our club founder and newsletter editor **Julia Hill** died in 1997, **Ural Lee Donohue** produced our newsletter for many years; we are indebted to her. We thank **Faye and Ross Cunningham** for their six years of work and artistry producing our newsletters. **Karen & Dick Barrett** will now use their many talents to compile the newsletter. Thank them when you see them.

New this coming year...a colorful, paperless newsletter to those who have computers, saving time, postage, paper and labor. Those who need paper copies will continue to receive them. Several members got active and committed to writing articles from time to time. If you have any information to submit, send it to **Karen Barrett**: kbarrettlvnv@earthlink.net by the 20th of the month prior to publication.

Here’s a little Nature Club history. **Julia and Steve Hill** moved to Bay City more than 25 years ago. She had a dream and a passion: to learn to identify all the wild birds of the USA, and she poured hours and hours and many trips into the project. She formed the **Bay City Nature Club** for people interested in nature, including the many species of wild birds that migrate through or make their home in our beautiful county. Most of us older members learned birding skills from Julie.

Enter **David Sitz!** A visionary himself, he brought to life **The Matagorda County Birding and Nature Center**. Our club supported him wholeheartedly, and hundreds of volunteers have kept the dream alive. David has given years of his life to this project. **Marilyn Sitz** has her own educational program. Join her at the center Wednesday mornings in the fall at 7:30 a.m. for a bird walk and talk. Visitors to our center come from all over the US and the world to experience nature and birds close up. Many local school groups visit during the school year. In 2009, we successfully hosted the meeting of the Texas Ornithological Society; many of its members were surprised and delighted by the birding opportunities here in our own wonderful backyard.

Get active! Call **Donna Younger**, director of the park, at **979-240-3640**, and volunteer a few hours at the kiosk. You are needed but the rewards returned by the Nature Center far outweigh your donation of time.

Arlene Bennett, Program Chairman

Upcoming Nature Events

- September 10 & 17, 8:00am-noon: Gulf Coast Bird Observatory’s Xtreme Hummingbird Extravaganza; for more information, see: (<http://www.gcbo.org/html/XHXPressRelease2011.pdf>)
- Third Saturday of every month: Bird Banding at GCBO’s Sanctuary in Lake Jackson, 8:00am-noon: Bird Banding
- December 19, 2011 – Mad Island Marsh Christmas Bird Count



View the magnificent wildlife at the Matagorda County Birding Nature Center!

Hummingbirds Have Arrived

by Francine Sanders

Ruby-throated hummingbirds heading south to Latin America from breeding grounds in North America usually show up in Texas by late July or early August, so by the time you receive this newsletter, migration will be in full swing. If you don't have a feeder up, now is the time to put one up. If you want to see hoards of these little jewels, put up more than one feeder. This helps to keep one bird from dominating a feeder.

Males, with their bright ruby-colored throats and sharp, pointed tails arrive first, followed by females and juveniles with grayish-white throats and bellies. Females have fan-shaped tails with white end feathers. Some juveniles have slightly reddish tints on their throats. Ruby-throated hummers depend on nectar or sugar water plus insects and spiders to fatten up, usually doubling their body weight from 3 grams to 6 grams. Hummers use the accumulated body fat to fuel their journey across or around the Gulf of Mexico to wintering grounds from southern Mexico to Central America.

Bird Notes:

- ✓ Not only can hummingbirds hover in mid-air, they can also fly backward, forward, up, down, and sideways.
- ✓ **Wings:** beat more than 50 times per minute.
- ✓ **Heart rate:** 1,200 beats a minute in flight, 250 at rest.
- ✓ **Tails:** Black-chinned hummingbirds pump their tails vigorously while hovering; ruby-throats hold tails steady.



Preparing Feeders

1. Fill feeders with one part white table sugar to four parts tap water.
2. **DO NOT** use red dye or honey in the mixture.
3. Replenish sugar water every two or three days in cool weather, but in the extreme heat we are having, sugar water should be changed every day or every other day.
4. Use red-colored feeders that signal nectar to hummers.
5. Discard yellow adornments that attract wasps and bees.
6. Remove "bee guards" that may damage hummers' beaks.
7. Leave feeders up through the winter. They do not prevent hummers from migrating, and the feeders provide nourishment for Western hummingbirds coming to Texas for the winter.

Personal note: When I lived in River Oaks, I left a feeder up all winter. Once I had a black-chinned hummer for four months. Another time I had a buff-bellied hummer in October and another in February.

Note: With permission, this article has excerpts from *Houston Chronicle's* nature writer, Gary Clark.

A Look at the Other Side of the World

By Karen McBride

My husband and I just returned from a 22-day Overseas Adventure Travel tour of China. It wasn't planned. It was one of those things that appeared in "Last Minute Deals" on their website and was just too good to pass up. We survived 11 flights and one overnight train; visited all the major cities; cruised the Yangtze River for four days; and spent 3 nights at 12,000 feet in Tibet. Now that it's time to write a summary, I find that it is nearly impossible to sort out all my feelings and opinions of such a vast, interesting, colorful, diverse country. I *can* tell you this: in all of my travels outside the U.S., this is the first time it truly felt like I was in a FOREIGN country.

Maybe that's because most people do not speak English (even though I think many understand it), or because of political and religious differences, or maybe the sheer numbers of people, or their very different habits and behavior. Whatever it is, China was a new world to us, and it was not an uncomfortable one. For example, even though Chongqing has 33 million inhabitants, the parks in the middle of the city are beautiful, serene, peaceful retreats from the hustle and bustle. Every city has those parks and every park has people playing mah-jongg, doing Tai Chi, or walking and exercising at all hours of the day and night. You can walk alone in those parks without worry or fear. If there is a spot of ground beside a high rise or between apartments or farm villas, there is a flourishing, organic garden, not a lawn. People spend a lot of time and energy tending those gardens.

This was not a birding trip, but, of course, that didn't stop me from looking. I wore my binoculars everywhere, spotting birds wherever I could – at temples, in parks, from buses, trains, boats, and even planes. Oh, how I wished for a birding guide in Tibet where there were so many birds that must forever remain nameless! By the end, I managed to ferret out 145 species (including 74 life birds) and to totally destroy my field guide in the rain.

But the sights, smells, and sounds of China were fascinating, and kept the 12 of us constantly engaged. Who would not be thrilled to stand on top of the Great Wall and see it snaking away into the distance over miles and miles of mountain tops? Or gaze in absolute awe into trenches filled with eight thousand life-sized soldiers, each sculpted with different faces, clothing, and weapons so many, many years ago? Or gaze upon snow-capped peaks from the top of the Potala Palace in Tibet, a place so magnificent that it defies description? Or watch the gorges and cliffs of the Yangtze River glide slowly by your riverboat balcony railing? And then to top the whole thing off with amazing nighttime views of the great city of Hong Kong from The Peak, and to spend the last full day with an actual birding guide in the marshes of Kowloon and the New Territories...well, I must admit it; I am still basking in the glow.

There are priceless memories, too, from ordinary places with ordinary people, like the overnight stay at the farmhouse of a couple who can't speak a word of English, and the afternoon we shared with a class of 5th graders in a poor country school. There was that great conversation with a farm family displaced by the rising waters of the new dam on the Yangtze, and the home visit in Tibet where we were served yak-butter tea. But pictures do a better job than words of describing China. Come to the November 8th Bay City Nature Club meeting and I will share some of my favorites with you.



Photo by Karen McBride

MATAGORDA BAY NATURE PARK WINS AWARD FOR YOUTH EDUCATION

A program to teach Bay City students how to be good stewards of water resources earned LCRA's Matagorda Bay Natural Science Center recognition with a Gulf Guardian Award in Youth Education. The three-year River Stewards Project involved working with more than 300 middle school students from Bay City.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program presented the award on Aug. 3 to Natural Science Center Manager Carolyn Nelson and Natural Science Programs Supervisor Betsy Terrel during a Gulf of Mexico Alliance All-Hands Meeting that included video highlights of all the recognized projects.

"The Gulf Guardian Award winners demonstrate great examples of collaborative efforts leading to solutions that address the Gulf of Mexico environment," said EPA Regional Administrator Al Armendariz. "Their accomplishments are making a positive difference in protecting and restoring the Gulf, and EPA is pleased to recognize their environmental stewardship."

The EPA's Gulf Guardian Awards program covers a five-state region – Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Mississippi and Alabama. The program recognizes environmental excellence toward achieving and preserving healthy and resilient coasts, and seeks to improve the environmental health of the Gulf in concert with economic development.

"The River Stewards Project enhanced the knowledge of science, increased coastal awareness, enriched classroom learning and promoted stewardship of natural resources as they progressed from sixth to eighth grade," said Betsy Terrel, LCRA natural science programs supervisor. "This project is one of many that LCRA's network of natural science centers has accomplished to promote conservation and stewardship of the Colorado River basin's natural resources."

With input from grade-level teachers, LCRA staff and Texas State University developed a curriculum that the science center used to conduct the River Stewards Project from 2006 to 2009. Each year, students in sixth grade, seventh grade and eighth grade participated in two day-long field excursions at the science center. Grade-level teachers administered an independent evaluator-designed pre- and post- test before and after each field excursion.

A comparison of eighth-grade River Stewards participants and ninth-grade students who did not participate in the program but were taught the same content showed that students who participated in River Stewards increased their knowledge of the topics.

Matagorda Bay Nature Park is a 1,600-acre park and preserve at the mouth of the Colorado River on the Matagorda Peninsula. LCRA developed the park to provide recreation, education, wetlands preservation and economic benefit to the region.

The park has about two miles of Gulf of Mexico and two miles river frontage and hundreds of acres of coastal marshes and dunes. It is one of the best birding areas in the nation. LCRA acquired the property in 2001 as part of its commitment to preserve natural resources for future generations and to provide science education, recreation and nature tourism opportunities

Editors' Note

I am hoping this stay-at-home job will be a little easier than the club presidency, which required the monthly drive to Bay City. We hope to make it to many of the meetings, but it is nice that we won't have to if events at home require our presence here. My 93 year-old mother is now receiving Hospice care, so we are getting some extra help. Keep us in your thoughts and prayers this year. (One good thing about Dementia: she gets a life bird every morning when the Cardinal shows up at the feeder – a new bird with every breakfast!)

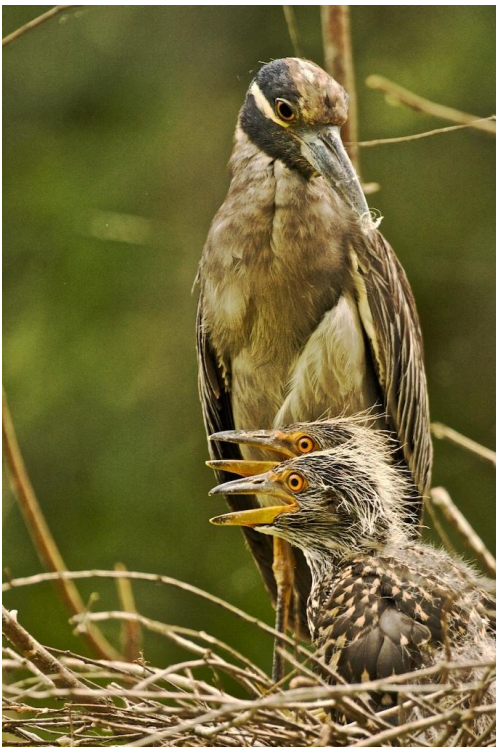
Send along your articles, notes of upcoming events, nature facts and jokes (we need a good laugh to cope with the heat and the climate-change deniers out there!).

Dick has 20,000 photographs that we can use, but we hope some of you will also contribute your own photos, especially those taken in Matagorda County, our great wildlife refuges, or while you are out birding, hiking, or just enjoying nature anywhere in Texas.

We need your contributions by the 20th of each month so we can send out the newsletters in time for the next meeting. Send text and pictures to: kbarrettlv@earthlink.net.

If you have email, you will get your newsletter in your digital mailbox. If not, we will continue to use snail mail for you.

Karen Barrett



Yellow-crowned Night Heron Family at the MCBNC

Are you're a member? Volunteer!!

Donna Younger can't do everything – let's help her out.

Last week *Nature* reported:

“There are 8.7 million eukaryotic* species on our planet — give or take 1.3 million. The latest biodiversity estimate, based on a new method of prediction, dramatically narrows the range of 'best guesses', which was previously between 3 million and 100 million. It means that a staggering 86% of land species and 91% of marine species remain undiscovered.”

How many species will be driven to extinction before they are ever discovered?

You can help! Get involved...

* eu·kar·y·ote [yoo-kar-ee-oht, -ee-uh t] noun

any organism having as its fundamental structural unit a cell type that contains specialized organelles in the cytoplasm, a membrane-bound nucleus enclosing genetic material organized into chromosomes, and an elaborate system of division by mitosis or meiosis, characteristic of all life forms except bacteria, blue-green algae, and other primitive microorganisms. (Source: Dictionary.com)