



# BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 151



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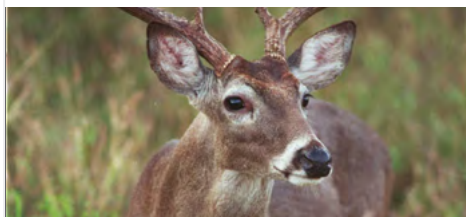
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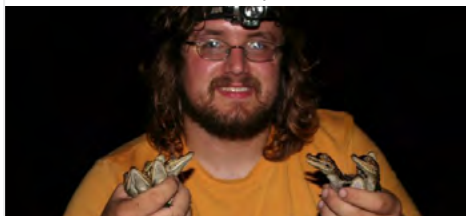
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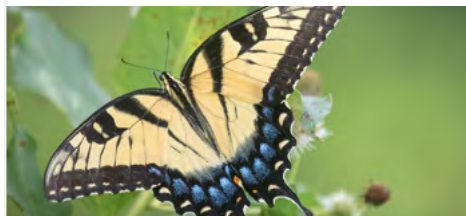
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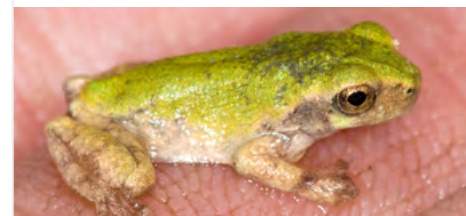
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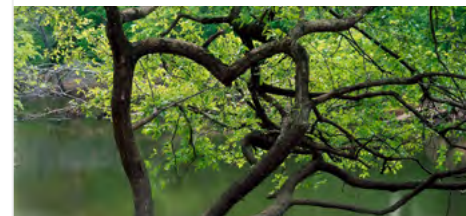
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# A Message from the Executive Director

Wendy Jo Ledbetter, Executive Director

The days of summer are upon us. I hope you have had time for a paddle or swim on the creek, or a balmy walk under the forest canopy.

In July, the Board of Directors began work to refresh the BTA's 5 year Strategic Plan. They will be completing this effort in August to chart strategies and actions to meet our mission. Our challenge is to honor the legacy of care and protection for the resources of the Big Thicket and expand our programs and connection with our community.

As we move forward we reflect on the history of those who came before us. For conservation in Southeast Texas the most familiar names come to mind - Maxine Johnston, Geraldine Watson, Pete Gunter. There are many more whose support and care are steadfast. Your hours and efforts are appreciated. I hope you will seek and find what element of our mission is your passion and interest and just like a visit to the creek in the summertime - jump in!

Looking forward to seeing everyone at the Big Thicket Day in October!

Yours in conservation,  
Wendy Jo Ledbetter



*Tricolored heron, photograph by Bruce Walker*



## A Message from the President

John Stafford, President

Looking back on 2021, we see what has been a busy and challenging time for BTA staff and volunteers who work at the office, on planning committees, and providing our programs to the public, all while observing COVID restrictions under which we operate. We thank them all for their diligence, dedication and accomplishments.

The committees whose hard work I'd like to highlight include the Neches River Rally Committee, responsible for sorting out the multitude of details involved, recruiting event workers, obtaining both monetary and in-kind resources necessary, and establishing safety and health protocols for the Rally, slated for September 11th.

Another group has begun work on preparations for the annual Big Thicket Day, an equally challenging task. That date is set for October 9th, so both staff and volunteers (many of whom are also on the Rally) are really challenged by the tight timeframe and demands on their time.

The other group which has committed much time and effort for our organization are Board members developing an updated 5 Year Strategic Plan necessary to guide our operations and required for several funding sources. Their goal is to have the finished product ready for distribution by early October.

BTA's Executive Director, Wendy Ledbetter, has been on staff for a year now and has demonstrated the leadership and administrative skills and talents necessary to fulfill her considerable responsibilities.

Our Director of Environmental Education, Dr. Terrie Looney, left our organization in June after over 3 years of dedicated and knowledgeable service. Taking on these responsibilities in August is Jennifer Knapp, whose credentials from Lamar University include a BS degree in Earth Science as well as an advanced degree in Secondary Education and Principal Certification. Please welcome her.

We are looking forward to a great fall with many activities, thanks to our hard working board and committees. Hope to see you all.

# Regional Flood Plan Efforts Underway

by Wendy J. Ledbetter, Executive Director

With historic flooding in Texas in 2019 the Texas Legislature created the state's first-ever regional and state flood planning process. The Region 5 Neches Regional Flood Planning Group (RFGP) was established by the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) on October 1, 2020. The RFGP is responsible for developing the first regional flood plan by January 2023. Region 5 has 24 counties, and includes the cities of Beaumont, Pt. Arthur, Lufkin, Nacogdoches, and Tyler.

Ellen Buchanan, former Past President of the Big Thicket Association and current President of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, is currently serving as a member of the Planning Committee. The Trust as well as BTA, the Texas Conservation Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, and the National Parks & Conservation Association are working together in a coalition to address nature-based solutions and other opportunities for sound management of natural resources.

Public meetings for additional input will be held in the fall (dates to be determined). You have an opportunity to voice your thoughts on regional flood planning and strategies for people and natural resources.

For more information on the Neches Regional Flood Planning Group go to: <https://nechesfloodplanning.org>

For more information on the Texas Water Development Board go to: [Region 5, Neches Flood Planning Region | Texas Water Development Board](#)



Photo credit, Kathy Smartt

# Port of Beaumont and *The Ivory Bill* Crew Partners on the Neches

by Wendy J. Ledbetter, Executive Director

Members of the Neches River Adventures/*The Ivory Bill* Crew enjoyed a tour of the Port of Beaumont operations on July 13<sup>th</sup>. Crewmembers joined Carol Gary, Community Relations Coordinator, for a tour of the Port's land and water-based operations.

As a community partner and sponsor of our organization the Port of Beaumont (POB) has teamed up with the BTA for informing and educating the public about the importance of the Sabine-Neches Waterway and the history and economic contributions of the Port for Southeast Texas. Expansion and improvements of the Port's facilities are slated for the coming years. *The Ivory Bill* tour routinely travels through the Port and with facilities and equipment on view, our passengers are interested in the history and commerce of Beaumont. There is a lot to see!

A variety of cargo products pass through the facilities including but not limited to aggregate, military equipment and supplies, agricultural goods, paper products, wind turbine components, crude oil, diesel, gasoline, iron, and steel. The Port is the largest U.S. strategic military outload port, and the third fastest growing port in the nation. It is the fifth largest U.S. port in terms of tonnage. A 2019 impact study estimated \$24.5 B in economic activity is generated annually from Port of Beaumont-related activities. An estimated 67,006 direct, indirect, induced, or related user jobs are generated by the POB channel.

Carol, and Sadé Chick, Director of Corporate Affairs, have offered additional assistance with educational contacts and networking assistance to expand our educational program. They also are putting the final additions on a rack card with information and stats on the Port that will be useful for our crew and docents to use aboard *The Ivory Bill*. As BTA tells the story of the Sabine-Neches Waterway, knowing the human story and how it has shaped and continues to shape the Big Thicket environment is important.

The Port of Beaumont has been a consistent sponsor of BTA and our events and we are grateful for their support. Later in the week, Carol joined crew members aboard *The Ivory Bill* to host students in the summer learning Camp Seaport from Port Arthur. We look forward to continuing to work with the Port of Beaumont!

Footnote: Carol announced her retirement for August, and we thank her for her contributions and years of service to BTA and our community. We wish her the best in the days ahead and her next adventures!



Photographs by Wendy J. Ledbetter

## Keynote Speaker for Big Thicket Day, October 9, Collier's Ferry Park

Matt Buckingham is a naturalist, photographer, and protected species biologist based out of Lufkin. Matt has spent the last 20 years exploring the Pineywoods and studying and photographing the region's incredible biodiversity. Matt received a bachelors in wildlife management from Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) in 2007. In 2011, Matt graduated from SFA with a masters in biology with an emphasis on ecology and evolutionary biology. For his thesis, Matt studied the bird communities of Iguazu National Park, Argentina. While in Argentina he met his wife, Carolina, who was studying monkeys at the time. Matt has a long history of working as a research biologist on a variety of projects including: the ecology of inland American alligators in the Pineywoods, migration ecology of Neotropical migrant songbirds along the Texas coast, nesting and population ecology of Snowy Plovers in the Texas panhandle, and developing population estimates and habitat preference models for secretive marsh birds in the Chesapeake Bay. Matt previously worked as a conservation biologist for Bayou Land Conservancy, a land trust in the Houston area. Currently Matt's work focuses on endangered species conservation, road ecology research, finding innovative ways to reduce impacts to wildlife from road construction activities, and developing solutions for wildlife/vehicle conflicts. Matt and Carolina currently live in Lufkin and spend as much time as possible exploring the Pineywoods around their home.



*Matt Buckingham and friends*



*Chronolog picture station, NPS image*

## Big Thicket Earns Texan by Nature Certification

by Megan Urban, BITH Chief of Interpretation and Education

If you have been hiking on the Kirby or Pitcher Plant trail in the past year, you might have seen the Chronolog picture station, where visitors can take photos and upload it to the Chronolog website. The photos are then pieced together to create a time-lapse of how the ecosystem changes throughout the year. These photo stations are at three of our more dynamic ecosystems: a cypress slough, the pitcher plant bog and one of our longleaf pine tree planting sites.

Using that project as a citizen science project, we applied to be a Texan by Nature certified site and were awarded the certification earlier this year. Texan by Nature Project Certification provides Texas organizations with recognition of meaningful conservation efforts involving and benefitting natural resources. We are excited to be recognized as a Texan by Nature certified site and hope that people continue to submit photos for this citizen science project.





New BITH rangers Heidi Dietze and Nathan Pattee, NPS image

## Big Thicket Welcomes Two New Permanent Rangers

Megan Urban, BITH Chief of Interpretation and Education

Heidi Dietze is the new community outreach and volunteer program manager. She moved from Washington DC, where she most recently worked at George Washington Memorial Parkway, where she was the volunteer coordinator for the Arlington House. Nathan Pattee has been working as a seasonal for the past 4 seasons and is happy to find his first permanent position here at Big Thicket. Next time you go on a ranger-led walk, explore the Visitor Center or go to a community event, stop by and say hi to our newest rangers!

## Neches River Adventure News

by Captain Bruce Walker, NRIB Committee Chair

### Leaving BTA's Neches River Adventures (NRIB) Program:

After years of being key personnel to the original NRIB program, Captain Debbie Loftus and Environmental Educator Terrie Looney, PhD, are stepping down. Captain Loftus and Dr. Looney were both associated with the program in its early days, even before BTA acquired the program from another non-profit. Captain Loftus has relocated to Cuero, Texas. Dr. Looney is retiring from her BTA staff position to concentrate on her new home and ranching duties north of Kountze. They will be remembered for their valuable contributions to BTA and *The Ivory Bill*. We wish them both well. Pictured are Captain Loftus (Left) and Doctor Looney (Right).



### Sabine Neches Navigation District (SNND) chartered

**BTA's Ivory Bill for video shoot:** *The Ivory Bill* provided the perfect vessel to conduct a high tech video shoot for the Navigation District. We spent two long days (19 hours) and covered many miles of the Neches River and the ship channel from the Beaumont Marina to Sabine Pass.





Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, photograph by Rich Kostecke

## Update on Recovering America's Wildlife Act

by Wendy J. Ledbetter, Executive Director

The Texas Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife is a coalition of businesses and organizations that recognize the value of healthy wildlife populations and realize that our natural heritage is in jeopardy.

With over 165 members, the Texas Alliance is a diverse coalition consisting of organizations and businesses who have come together to support fish and wildlife conservation, outdoor recreation, and conservation education.

Currently the coalition is focused on the recent introduction into the House of Representatives of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R. 2773 and S.2372). Over 1300 species in Texas have been identified as having greatest conservation need. This list includes species often overlooked - like bees, butterflies, and freshwater mussels.

S.2372 was introduced in the U.S. Senate in July by Martin Heinrich (D-NM) and Roy Blunt (R-MO). Representatives Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) introduced a similar version of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act in the U.S. House in April (H.R.2773). Currently the House bill has 101 national bipartisan co-sponsors. Four Texans are currently sponsors of this legislation.

The Act would provide \$1.3 billion per year to states, and \$97.5 million to tribal nations, from existing revenues, to fund wildlife conservation, habitat management and restoration, outdoor recreation, and education programs. If passed, dollars would be distributed to help implement on-the-ground efforts for the state's most critical species as identified in the Texas Conservation Action Plan. Texas would be eligible for more than \$50 million per year. This is one of the most significant pieces of legislation for a large influx of funds to benefit the outdoor spaces you enjoy, and the species and habitats that are unique to Texas.

For more information go to: <https://www.txwildlifealliance.org/>

# Village Creek

by Aimee Lieby, BTA Director

Tucked into the southern end of the Big Thicket, Village Creek State Park is a delightful, mid-sized state park with a variety of activities for everyone to enjoy. Surprisingly, many people are unaware that this park even exists in Hardin County and boy are they missing out!

Village Creek State Park opened in 1994 and is bordered by the eponymous Village Creek. Visitors can enjoy camping at both primitive and water/electric sites, quaintly nestled amongst the trees. Wake up refreshed from a night of peaceful sleep in this quiet park and enjoy a bike ride or nature walk on some of the eight miles of trails. These trails take you through a variety of ecosystems including cypress swamps, longleaf pine thickets, and arid sandylands. The park layout makes it easy to hike as little or as much as you prefer. Observant explorers might see deer, a variety of reptiles, prickly pear, colorful fungi, and a great variety of birds. For a special treat, check out the quarter mile Bike and Fitness Trail sponsored by local Girl Scouts troops. This brief jaunt through the trees features a variety of fitness stations and makes a great primer for off-road biking.

If you're ready for a cool down after your hike, take a canoe trip down Village Creek and wet a line. The Creek is home to catfish, bass, bluegill, and more. Keep your eyes peeled for freshwater mussels, inching their way along the sandy bottom! While there is no swimming allowed in the park, there are a number of sandbars to stop at and dip your toes in the cool creek water. VCSP is planning to offer canoe and kayak rentals soon, so plan to bring your own watercraft in the interim. The park office does have fishing gear to lend and a fishing license is not required in the park.



*The gentle waters of Village Creek, photograph by Aimee Lieby*

End your trip with a relaxing night under the stars, listening to the gentle hoot of owls and the scamper of nocturnal animals.

The park is open daily from 8am to 10pm with periodic special events and activities. Admission is only \$4, or free with a Texas State Parks Pass. Love the park? Park Rangers host monthly volunteer events to help improve facilities for everyone. The park also has a covered pavilion and group campsites available for reservation.

Check out the park's website for more information and trail maps:

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/village-creek>



*Squirrel Tree Frog (Dryophytes squirellus), Lance Rosier Unit, photograph by Michael Black, BTA director*

## Thicket of Diversity: Research Funds Available

by Mary C. Johnston, BTA Director

The Thicket of Diversity was established in 2006 to identify every living species inhabiting the Big Thicket National Preserve and the Southeast Texas region. Costa Rican research by Dr. Daniel Janzen inspired the inventory work. He believed one cannot identify species that are lost by climate change and other factors without an understanding of what was originally present.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park was the first to replicate the collection of baseline data. Since the inception of the Thicket of Diversity, 3263 species have been identified, including species new to science.

Approximately \$13,000 is available per project for the researcher, intern or graduate student, vehicle or boat rental and fuel. Proposals are reviewed and selected by a science committee.

The research and permitting process, guidelines and limitations, and the Request for Proposal can be found on [Thicketofdiversity.org](http://Thicketofdiversity.org).

For information you may email: [Director@bigthicket.org](mailto:Director@bigthicket.org)  
(or you may email Mary C. Johnston, [mathicket@aol.com](mailto:mathicket@aol.com))

Painting on cigar box by Isabelle Scurry Chapman

## Birds of the Big Thicket: Blue Jay

Phoebe H. Dishman, BTA director and Bulletin editor  
Adapted from her book of essays *Evangeline and the Mysterious Strangers*

Tucked into my grandmother’s bird guide, a newspaper article, brittle with age. “Don’t Gainsay the Blue Jay: This blue blusterer may offend your ears, but there are other sides to the story.” The article begins: “People often look at the bad side of blue jays because they make noise, quarrel, rob nests, attack cats, and lack humility. But there are finer sides to their personality—besides being beautiful, of course. For one, they are the sentinels of bird-dom. When they set up a shriek all the other birds know a hawk or your cat is nearby. And if the hawk or cat keeps coming, the jays will close ranks and attack. Many a Robin or songster owes its life to warrior blue jays.”

The blue team. Squalling, impersonating hawks, scabbling on my roof. In the birdbath, showers of diamonds. On the nest, whispering to their babies. Whether in the Thicket or in my back yard, I’m always glad to see them. (Two delights on the subject, highly recommended: Mark Twain’s short story “A Blue Jay Yarn.” Julie Zickefoose’s *Saving Jemima: Life and Love with a Hard-Luck Jay.*)



### My own tribute:

If a jay can rise with every dawn  
and take up his duty on my back lawn,  
if he can fit a bandit’s mask  
to full embrace of heaven’s task  
and love his Creator with all his might,  
with all his shadow, and all his light,  
if a jay be nimble, and brave and strong,

and ready to say when he is wrong,  
if he can stand in the gap and shriek,  
if he can help the mild and weak,  
if he can narrow those bold black eyes  
and get in some licks before he dies,  
well, give me a jolt of electric blue  
and let me be a jaybird too!



## SAVE THE DATES

### Every Saturday, Ivory Bill Tours

Neches River Adventures public tours every Saturday through November 6, at 10 a.m. Private charters are available all year. Free school field trips are available to qualifying schools. [www.nechesriveradventures.org](http://www.nechesriveradventures.org)

### October 9, 2021, BTA Membership and Board of Directors Meeting, Collier's Ferry Park

9:00 a.m., to be followed by our program and guest speaker, Matt Buckingham, from 9:30 – 11:00 a.m.

### October 9, 2021, Big Thicket Day on the Neches at Collier's Ferry Park

11:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Free event, open to the public. Activities for the entire family: boat rides aboard the Ivory Bill, picnic lunch, exhibitors and vendors, live music, and more. Celebrating 57 years of BTA and 47 years of the Big Thicket National Preserve.

### Saturday, December 11, 2021

Volunteer Day of Service, Longleaf Pine Tree Planting, Big Thicket Natl. Preserve

### Monday, January 17, 2022

MLK Volunteer Day of Service - Longleaf Pine Planting with Big Thicket Natl. Preserve

### Monday, February 22, 2022

Presidents Day - Volunteer Day of Service - Longleaf Pine Planting with Big Thicket Natl. Preserve

## BTA Director Publishes Book

Phoebe Dishman, BTA Director and Bulletin Editor

Penny Clark, BTA Director, has just written a regional history book titled "Beaumont's Civil Air Patrol in World War II," published by Acadian Publishing.

Penny is Special Collections Librarian for Lamar University. She holds a BS in Education, an MA in Historical Administration and Museum Studies, and an MA in U.S. history. Among her responsibilities at LU are assisting researchers, digitizing photographs and documents, creating metadata, overseeing archival storage, acquisition of materials, grant writing, and enhancing community awareness of LU's Special Collections. She has published books and monographs, scholarly articles, and myriad articles in the popular press. Her community leadership includes Golden Triangle Sierra Club, Beaumont Heritage Society, Beaumont Music Commission, Col. George Moffett Chapter of the DAR, Southeast Texas Genealogical and Historical Society, and Texas Gulf Historical Society. She has been a BTA Director since 2017.

Penny's new book references the Big Thicket, and most of its photographs are from Lamar Library's Special Collections. For those interested, the Collections also offer many photographs of the natural and cultural riches of the Big Thicket in the early part of the 20th century.

To buy her book, go to <https://www.amazon.com/Beaumonts-Civil-Patrol-Images-Aviation/dp/1467106208/>

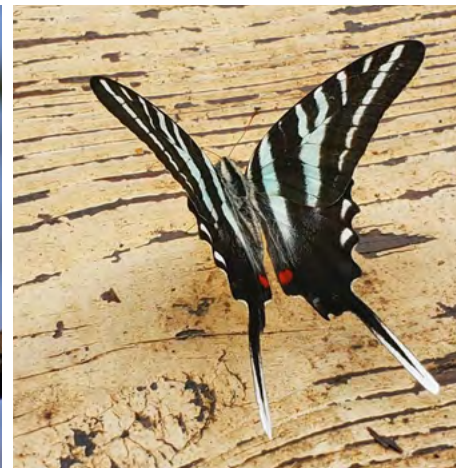
You may also buy a copy at our Big Thicket Day at Collier's Ferry, October 9.



# BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

#BIGTHICKET







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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)

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

