



BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 153

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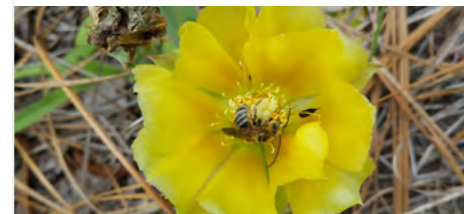
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A Message from the President

John Stafford, BTA director and board president

Greetings to Members and Friends of BTA!

As we begin a new year, we look forward to a number of great events and a much more active year of conservation, preservation and education in the Big Thicket. I would encourage each of you to review the goals of our organization on the last page of this issue.

As mentioned elsewhere, we have now announced our two main events, Neches River Rally and Big Thicket Day. **Save those Dates** on your calendars. Both were highly successful and well attended in past years and we anticipate bigger and better in 2022.

Our Environmental Education programs are gearing up and we already have many tours scheduled for school age children on the Ivory Bill. As you know we offer **free** one- and two-hour tours for both public, private and home schools in our area. The TEKS aligned curriculum includes a 2 hour Field Lab for 5th - 12th grade, as well as a 1 hour Habitat Lesson for pre-K – 4th grade. **Docent volunteers are needed for this and other Ivory Bill tours.** Contact Director Jennie Knapp at nribedu@gmail.com.

BTA just launched a new on-line booking system called FareHarbor. Founded in Hawaii in 2013, with over 15,000 clients worldwide and the fastest growing team in the business, FareHarbor creates powerful tools that help tour and activity operators run their business with ease and efficiency. We feel it will improve our ability to manage our tours, equipment and crews and provide a better experience for our passengers. Public tours begin on March 26 and Private Charters are available year round.

The National Park Service/Big Thicket National Preserve recently loosened restrictions on activities at our Field Research Station and Learning Center located in Saratoga, Texas. Groups will be classified as 'pods' and now allowed use at full capacity with only limited restrictions due to COVID.

For more information, see our website [Thicket of Diversity](https://www.bigthicket.org) or contact director@bigthicket.org. We already have several groups booked for spring and summer. A calendar of current bookings is on our website. Further, several research projects that we delayed due to COVID travel restrictions will resume including freshwater mussels, bees, leeches, and a new project for tiger beetles through Rice University. **Funds are still available for new research projects through grants for TCEQ.**

The board continues implementation of our new Strategic Plan as well as raising funds for ongoing programs. We will look to our past sponsors and members to help financially and with their time and talents. We look forward to a great year in 2022 with many activities thanks to our hard working board and committees.



*Environmental
Education programs
for school age children*



Brammer house, at FRSLC in Saratoga



Photo courtesy of Ben Jones

BTA Board Member and Texan of the Year Finalist, Ben Jones

Bruce Walker, BTA Director

BTA has a lot to be proud of, especially our very active board members and their unique contributions to conservation. We would like to recognize board member Ben Jones for his many conservation achievements and most recently for being chosen as a finalist for the 2021 *Dallas Morning News* **TEXAN OF THE YEAR**.

Currently Executive Director of the Texas Conservation Alliance, Ben has over twenty years of conservation experience. This includes education, advocacy, habitat restoration, and species protection in Texas and around the world. Formerly, Ben was Center Director for the Trinity River Audubon Center and later served as Senior Director of Conservation at the Dallas Zoo.

In a recent article in the **Dallas Morning News*, Ben was recognized for his efforts in leading the Lights Out Texas initiative in Dallas. Lights Out Texas is a campaign to darken the night sky across Texas and save thousands of migrating birds from deadly collisions with lighted buildings.

Research from Cornell University reveals that about 1 billion birds migrate through our state every year. Many of them die in collisions with lighted buildings. Lights Out Texas began in 2017 after about 400 birds struck a single building one night in Galveston.

For 80 mornings this past fall, Ben and about 50 volunteers searched the streets of downtown Dallas looking for bird casualties. They found hundreds of birds that died overnight. The largest cities in the state have now joined the effort to make the skies darker during the peak migration nights. Jones said the downtown Dallas skyline was noticeably darker this year, with about 30 buildings turning off their lights.

Jones and his team have been champions of the cause, not just collecting corpses, but enlisting volunteers, documenting data for further study and rescuing 200 stunned birds. There's no way to know exactly how many birds have been saved, but data is promising. This past fall, Jones and his volunteers collected 383 dead birds on the streets of downtown Dallas. That's 74 fewer than they collected in the fall of 2020, before the campaign really took off. And that's despite canvassing 80 mornings this year vs. 50 mornings last year. Jones said there is evidence that when a building is dark, there's as much as a 70% decrease in the chances of bird collisions.

Congratulations to Ben Jones, BTA Board Member and a great activist.

**Dallas Morning News, December 30, 2021*

Art in the Park

Megan Urban, BITH Chief of Interpretation and Education

Artists have taken inspiration from national park landscapes long before the landscapes even became national park sites. Smart leaders of public lands took those art works and used them to draw visitors to their parks. Such leaders include Ansel Adams and the Kolb brothers, to name a few. Here at Big Thicket, we are excited to host another series of Art in the Park through partnership with the International Fiber Council. This is the fourth art show being displayed in the visitor center and schools from across Texas and other states sent in some fantastic art. This year's theme was "The Waterways of Big Thicket" and schools were invited to send in artwork showcasing all the ways humans and animals use our many waterways. Scenes of kayakers floating down a river, ducks enjoying the water, and various animals native to the area currently grace the walls of the visitor center. Come take a look for yourself at this wonderful artwork. It will be on display through the end of April.



"Pastel Forest," by artist Bailey from Forest Heights Academy of Excellence, Baton Rouge, LA



Photo credit, Bruce Walker



Photo credit, Bruce Walker

Annual Super Bowl Sunday Hike

Bruce Walker, BTA Director

It was good to get back into “The Thicket” and host a BTA “Explore Your Thicket” hike. Our last hike was Super Bowl 2020, due to Covid-19 restriction. The outing committee, consisting of Bruce Walker, Randy Beehn, and Charles Smith, met our hikers at the Kirby Nature Trail head. Bruce Walker gave a brief trail-head talk and Randy Beehn led our hikers around the outside trails of the outer and inner loops. We recommend this hike as a great introduction to the National Preserve. This is an easy short three-mile hike that takes you through several plant communities, from baygalls to cypress sloughs to the riparian zone along Village Creek. If you’re introducing someone new to the Big Thicket, be sure to start at the Big Thicket Visitors Center. There you will find a great gift shop, trail maps, exhibits, and a short film about the Preserve.



Photo credit, Bruce Walker

Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust Conserves Land

Submitted by Ellen Buchanan

The Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust has received a donation of 53.73 acres of land adjacent to the Lance Rosier Unit of the Preserve near Kountze. The property was once part of a large longleaf pine savannah and contains remnant longleaf pine and associated understory. A large pitcher plant bog is located in the Preserve next to the property.

Our donor chooses to remain anonymous, but the son of the donor said the donation was a great tribute to his Dad. His Dad loved the land, had reared his kids out there and found great peace and quiet in the forest. The property donation is greatly appreciated and we look forward to the property's inclusion in the Preserve boundary.

The mission of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust is to protect and conserve lands in southeast Texas to ensure that examples of natural landscapes are left intact for today and for the future. Land and water stewardship are essential to a healthy Texas. Protected lands conserve our water supply, contribute to flood resiliency, provide habitat for wildlife, and improve our quality of life.

For more information check out Bigthickettrust.org or email bigthickettrust@gmail.com.



Environmental activist and Big Thicket advocate Maxine Johnston



Aimee Lieby, tranquil beach on the Neches

Canyonlands Unit, Off the Beaten Path

Aimee Lieby, BTA Director

The Big Thicket National Preserve plays host to 40 miles of hiking trails, each with a unique biodiversity that is sure to offer something for everyone to enjoy. Casual day hikers and overnight backpackers alike have the opportunity to experience the natural beauty of this region. For those hikers seeking a little more adventure off the beaten path, you might consider checking out the Canyonlands Unit in Tyler County, in the northeast corner of BTNP.

The Canyonlands Unit is one of the BTNP's primitive units. You will not find shaded boardwalks, restrooms, or interpretive signs here, but you will find enchanting cypress sloughs, beautiful vistas of the Neches River, and dramatic cliffs! The unique topography of this area creates a challenge for hikers but promises a rare opportunity to climb

elevation in the typically flat terrain. When the Neches River is at normal levels, there are several beaches perfect for a rest stop or picnic lunch. Navigate your way north to Round Lake and catch a glimpse of snowy egrets or a raft of ducks. As you make your way back to your vehicle, be sure to stop and take in the incredible variety of organisms who call the flooded bottomland forests home.

Hikers interested in exploring the Canyonlands Unit will definitely want to plan ahead. There are no improved trails, no signs marking locations or turns, and the unit is fairly isolated. Hikers should plan to navigate by GPS and compass and be self-reliant. As always, ensure someone knows your hiking plan and when to expect you to return by.

Check out the NPS website for more information:

<https://www.nps.gov/bith/planyourvisit/canyonlands-unit.htm>



Aimee Lieby, the winding Neches River



Aimee Lieby, a rare glimpse at a frost flower



Painting by Isabelle Scurry Chapman

The Carolina Chickadee

I walk on legs that ache a bit yet pull me along
 To enjoy hearing and seeing the tiny chickadee
 Flitting through the brush,
 Yapping about this and that,
 Fussing at me for interrupting her daily routine,
 Telling larger birds to watch out,
 A joy to behold, to observe, to absorb.

-from a poem by Jim Blackburn, environmental lawyer and planner

Bright as a button, twice as cute
 Zero to sixty, loop the loop!
 See him hurry tree to tree
 "See bee see bay," chickadee!
 He plays, he sparkles: Bring him seed!
 For after all he has to feed
 Sturdy he is, remarkably agile
 But in his haste he can be fragile:
 Once he smacked into my house
 Dropped to the ground as still as a mouse
 His friends made outcry in a tree
 I came, I saw, I lifted he
 Still he was, as still as death
 But I could tell he still had breath
 After some minutes beyond his recall
 Of being my darling so fragile and small
 Quoth I, "At least your neck's not broke"
 He must have heard, for he awoke
 Opened his eyes, absorbed my face
 Then flipped to his feet and called it grace
 No hungry feline him did gobble
 Then off to the tree line he did wobble
 -Phoebe Dishman, BTA director, Bulletin editor



Bennett in the field, shared by Dr. Daniel Bennett

BTA Thicket of Diversity Accomplishments, 2021

Mary Catherine Johnston, BTA director

Approved by: Megan Urban, Daniel Bennett, Robert Laroche,
John Stafford

The Thicket of Diversity, established in 2007, is committed to wetland species and ecosystem analysis. Baseline inventories are conducted and tallied. This data can then be compared in later years to determine species diversity and the effects of climate change.

Research during this second year of Covid buzzed as Dr. Daniel Bennett of Stephen F. Austin State University and Dr. John Pascarella, Dean of College of Sciences and professor at Sam Houston State University guided bee research to completion. From 2017-2021, the project documented 130 species variously occurring among several habitats. Students sorted bees from bulk samples, pinned, labeled and analyzed specimens. SFA graduate student Archie Sauls conducted fieldwork and prepared the release of a thesis, *The Bees of Two Sites in the Big Thicket National Preserve, Texas, with a Consideration of the Effects of a Rare Flooding Event*. His work highlighted species richness and abundance differences before and after Hurricane Harvey for ground nesting and above ground nesting bees.

Printing for a poster, *Impacts of Fire and Flooding Events on Insects in the Big Thicket National Preserve*, by Daniel Bennett and Xander Haynes, was donated. The poster was displayed in the Big Thicket Field Research Station Learning Center in Saratoga as part of an exhibit of past research conducted through the Thicket of Diversity.

The Saratoga facility provides housing, a kitchen, lab and classroom for visiting researchers. Covid restrictions limited occupancy. Nevertheless, its dorm was utilized for approximately 100 days. Guests included a new park ranger transferring to the area with his wife, and Texas Conservation Corp volunteers.

A new project, *Exploring Tiger Beetle Diversity Associated with Salt Domes across East Texas*, authored by Robert Laroche of Rice University, Daniel Duran, Scott Egan, and Will Godwin, was approved for funding. Saline habitats represent challenging environments for living organisms. The goal of this project is to explore the hidden, isolated, and underexplored saline habitats distributed across the Big Thicket region for locally adapted populations of salt associated tiger beetles.

In 2021 the Thicket of Diversity received \$8668 to support research. Projects are performed with penalty monies from Texas Commission on Environmental Quality Enforcement actions. The Thicket of Diversity Science Committee requests proposals in a competitive process. Limited funds are available for new grants in 2022.

The Thicket of Diversity participated in Big Thicket Day 2021. Dr. Randall Yoder provided a canopy for the display. Honor student Teri Wolfe created two coloring sheets that were added to a learning activity bag along with Kountze High School designed artwork. Over 100 children benefitted.



Opuntia cactus flower and a Melissodes bee, shared by Dr. Daniel Bennett

Work continued on the Thicket of Diversity website by Dr. Jeff Pittman, Mary Johnston, Dale Parrish, and John Stafford. The committee was co-chaired by Dr. Yoder and Dr. Matt Pyne, both of Lamar University.

For more information and grant guidelines, see www.thicketofdiversity.org.



SAVE THE DATES

Neches River Adventures: Public Tours from March - November 2022

10am to 12pm

Collier's Ferry Park, 5390 Pine Street, Beaumont, TX 77703

2 Hour: Eco-History Tours every Saturday from March 26th to November 5th. Leaving Collier's Ferry Park at 10am. Tour the Neches River's backwater channels into the Big Thicket National Preserve and the Port of Beaumont. Check our online scheduling for departure details and schedule changes for certain dates. Reserve your space aboard the Ivory Bill. Fees apply.

Neches River Rally: September 10, 2022

8am to 2pm

LNVA Salt Water Barrier Boat Ramp, 6790 Bigner Road, Beaumont, TX 77708

9th Annual Neches River Rally. This year's route will take paddlers through the Big Thicket National Preserve via the 4-mile Cooks Lake to Scatterman Texas Paddling Trail. Paddlers will experience the open waters of the Neches River and the bald cypress/water tupelo swamp. Canoes and kayaks will launch and return to the LNVA Saltwater Barrier location in Beaumont. Bring your personal boat or reserve a boat. All participants must pre-register. Fees apply.

Big Thicket Day on the Neches: October 8, 2022

10am to 3pm

Collier's Ferry Park, 5390 Pine Street, Beaumont, TX 77703

Big Thicket Day on the Neches is a **FREE EVENT** that is open to the public. Activities in the park begin with our annual membership gathering at 10:00am. Beginning at 11:30am enjoy a complimentary picnic lunch, live entertainment, free boat tours aboard the Ivory Bill, and other activities for the entire family.

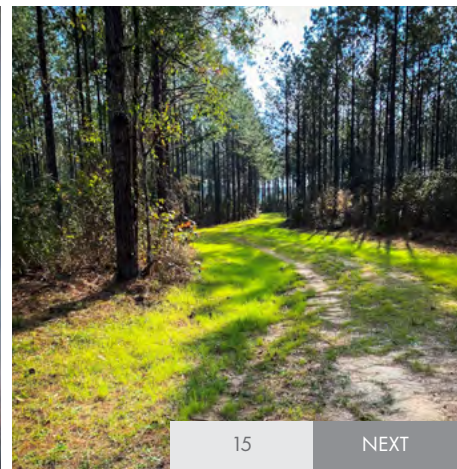




BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

#BIGTHICKET





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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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