



BIG THICKET BULLETIN

ISSUE 158



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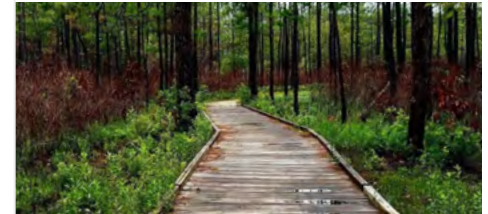
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A Message from the President

John Stafford, BTA director and board president

Greetings to Friends and Members of BTA!

Summer seems to be finally here as temperatures approach the 90's. It's a great time to explore nature and the Preserve.

Our annual **Neches River Rally** was held a few weeks ago on May 6 and was well attended even after moving to spring. Everyone loved our colorful yellow and red T-shirts with special NRR logo and names of our sponsors. We had many volunteers and even some new or returning sponsors. Huge thanks to **LNVA** for use of the Salt Water Barrier launch site, to Westbrook HS NROTC group's invaluable assistance in launching and recovery of kayaks and canoes and to Gerald Cerda with Big Thicket Outfitters who did a fabulous job as always. The Angus beef hamburgers lunches were scrumptious. Thanks to all!

Our annual **Big Thicket Day Celebration and General Membership Meeting** is scheduled for October 7th, again at Collier's Ferry Park in Beaumont. The planning committee will be starting work by the end of May.

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. We always need docents and deck hands for our environmental education tours. [Sign up to volunteer on our website.](#)





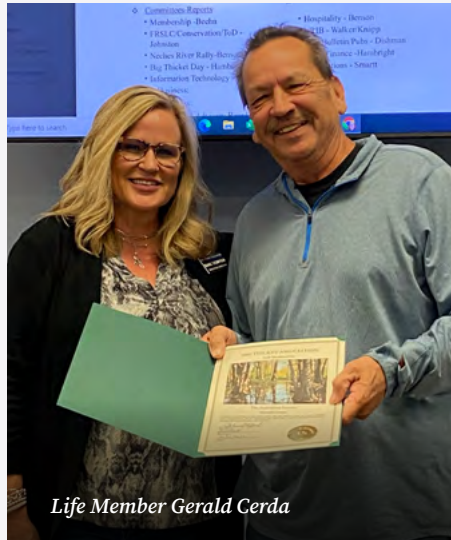
Port Arthur LNG Environmental Champions



Life Member Aimee Lieby



Life Member Rebekah Foster



Life Member Gerald Cerda

BTA's membership committee is planning outings for both members and non-members in the fall. Check our website and emails in coming weeks for a special guided charter bus tour of the Big Thicket Preserve.

At our April board meeting, Executive Director Diane Thompson surprised several individuals with Life Memberships for their service and in obtaining significant grants to BTA. Life memberships were presented to *Rebekah Foster* from TotalEnergies, *Gerald Cerda* of Big Thicket Outfitters, and Director *Aimee Lieby* of ExxonMobil for past donations to the Big Thicket Association.

BTA has been successful this year in obtaining grants from various foundations and organizations and was recently recognized as a "**Port Arthur LNG Environmental Champion**" at an awards reception. Diane Thompson and John Stafford attended and received the award and check for our Environmental Education program at the event.

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

BTA Membership Committee Hosts Spring Hike

Diane Thompson, BTA Executive Director

Big Thicket Association’s Membership Committee hosted a spring hike at the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary on April 23. The hike was led by preserve manager, Shawn Benedict. Sandyland Sanctuary is located just north of Beaumont in Silsbee, and is owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy. The preserve is 5,673 acres of pure beauty, and it was a perfect day for a spring hike with the temperature at only 60 degrees!

Before the hike began, Shawn spoke to the 23 participants about the sanctuary and their mission. They are preserving a very biodiverse area that includes cactus, pines, ferns, wildflowers, and wildlife. The flowers and plants were on full display this spring day. There are over 700 plant species and more than 200 animal species in the preserve. Within the preserve there are meadows, swamps, thickets, bogs, and rare plants. Paddlers may canoe Village Creek, which borders Sandyland Sanctuary. This meandering creek boasts gorgeous white sandbars and a plethora of birds calling.

An interesting practice Shawn talked about was the prescribed burns that are necessary to restore and maintain the longleaf pines. He likes to say, “Longleaf pines are the trees that fire built.” They need fire to control vegetation from smothering the new longleaf pines, and to help control disease. Plants that grow on the forest floor depend on fire to grow. The bark of the longleaf pine is so thick it isn’t harmed by the fire. From the blackened bark on the trees and soil it was evident that Shawn and his fire crew had done prescribed burns this winter. It was amazing to witness how life rose from the fire and flowers were blooming everywhere plus the trees and plants were a rich green.

If you have never visited Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary, then you have missed out on a special treat. We had a wonderful time with a gracious host.



Happy hikers



Tough bark, necessary fire



Art students on the Ivory Bill
Photos by Captain Bruce Walker, NRIB Committee Chair



Bonnie Few Walker



Plein air painting

BTA's Neches River Adventures program hosts Eco-Art Boat

Artist Bonnie Few Walker demonstrated various watercolor painting techniques and participants created watercolor painting of images they observed while aboard the *Ivory Bill*. Plein air painting or outdoor painting is a method that dates back to the 19th century French Impressionist art movement. The artists captured the beauty of life by painting sunsets, landscapes, and bodies of water. Our backdrop was the Cooks Lake to Scatterman paddling trail "cut through" in the Big Thicket Preserve.

Summertime at Big Thicket

Big Thicket National Preserve

As the weather heats up, rangers at Big Thicket get ready for a summer filled with walks, paddle programs and fishing clinics, to name a few.

This year Big Thicket is excited to share that rangers will lead 2 sunset paddle trips in July. These paddles are designed for experienced paddle enthusiasts who want to explore the waterways as the light changes. Certain safety precautions will be implemented to keep both visitors and rangers safe. These paddle programs will take place on Friday, July 21st and Saturday, July 29th. Reservations are required and open 2 weeks before the paddle date.

In addition to our paddle programs, Big Thicket rangers will host two paddle clinics; these are great programs for beginning paddlers. Rangers take a small group out on the water for 10-15 minutes to get people comfortable with being in a boat and learn basic paddle skills. While on land, visitors will learn more about the waterways of Big Thicket and what they can do to keep them clean. These paddle clinics will take place on Saturday, May 27th and Wednesday, June 28th at Baby Galvez launch area in Silsbee from 10am-2pm. Reservations are not required for this program.

Fishing is a great way to get outdoors during the summer heat and Big Thicket rangers are providing two opportunities for the public to fish with a ranger. Texas free fishing day is on June 3rd and rangers will be at the launch area at Hwy 327 on Village Creek from 10-2pm with different stations teaching about fishing. Rangers will have additional poles for visitors who might not have fishing gear. If you can't make it to the free fishing clinic on June 3rd, Big Thicket rangers will be out at the same location on Saturday, August 26th. Fishing licenses and reservations are not required for these programs.

Look for more news about programs and announcements about the upcoming 50th anniversary events on [nps.gov/bith](https://www.nps.gov/bith) and @BigThicketNPS on social media!



S. Sharaga/NPS photo



NPS photo

Off the Beaten Trail in 1962

Dennis Durkee, BTA member

Before the Big Thicket National Preserve was established in 1974, many were putting the spotlight on this unique region.

One was Ed Syers, who wrote a column in the 1960s and 1970s on the history and lore of Texas. "Off the Beaten Trail" appeared in major newspapers around the state.

In August 1962, he visited Lance Rosier in Saratoga and wrote about the Big Thicket.

For thousands of Texans in places like Austin, Corpus Christi, Waco, and Fort Worth, it may have been their first up-close report about this vast wilderness.

"I have skirted swampy Everglades and fringed some sullen edges of Okefenokee," Syers wrote to start the column. "And I can accept Lance Rosier's flat statement that – wild mile for mile – there is no wilderness in America to beat Texas' Big Thicket."

"The Big Thicket is the vast, impenetrable forest ... that has barred much of the southeast corner of Texas in exotic beauty, unreachable depth and mysterious legend since before the white man."

Syers was a storyteller, and Rosier was full of Big Thicket stories.

"Once a sweating lumberman stopped him deep inside, asked him what he was doing. He was searching out a rare plant which some botanists had asked about.

"I'm looking for a flower," said Lance.

"Hell, Slim! You can do better'n that with your time!"

"Well, he couldn't," Syers wrote.

Assuming many Texans did not know where the Big Thicket was, he suggested they get a map. He told them to draw a rough circle north from Liberty through

Moss Hill to Livingston, then east to Woodville, then south through Kountze to U.S. 90 near Beaumont.

"This is really not its perimeter," Syers wrote. "Once, they defined everything south of the old San Antonio Road – down from Nacogdoches – and west as far as the Brazos as Big Thicket."

Syers asked "if they went to set you down in one place, Mr. Rosier – the one place it would be toughest to get out of -- where would that be?"

Rosier thought for a while, reflecting back to 1936 when he helped survey the region. "Three miles northwest of Honey Island. You cross Bad Luck Creek in the swamps of Panther Den. You crawl the last mile. You just can't stand up at all."

Rosier asked Syers if he wanted to head that way. "I thanked him, just the same," he wrote with a chuckle.



This illustration appeared in newspapers around Texas in August 1962, accompanying Ed Syers' column on the Big Thicket. Two years before the Big Thicket Association was officially organized, Syers' column helped spread awareness about the Big Thicket across the state.

Letter to the Editor

Beaumont Enterprise
November 30, 2022

Speedway vs. Parkway: Thank you for your excellent coverage of the opposition to the Texas Department of Transportation's "new" plan to clearcut the median on the Big Thicket National Parkway that passes by the Preserve's Visitors Center. I served on a Stakeholder's Advisory Panel for several years while the expansion plan was being developed. TxDOT assured us that the trees could be saved, that they could maintain the look and feel of driving through a National Park, and create a Gateway to the Big Thicket. This would complement the Preserve and provide a safe and efficient evacuation route for Southeast Texas. TxDOT's reasoning for the clearcut is simply that "trees kill people" and must be removed to save lives. TxDOT knows better...our citizens know better. Speed kills people. If we want to reduce the number of deaths on Texas highways, reduce the speed limit in areas that are considered a high risk for accidents and fatalities. If the speed limit needs to be lower on this section of the Parkway, then plan on posting an appropriate speed limit and enforcing it. Don't turn the Parkway into a Speedway!

Bruce Walker, Beaumont, TX



Photo: Kim Brent/Beaumont Enterprise

Wild World with Scott Solomon

Mary Catherine Johnston, BTA director, Thicket of Diversity chair

A new podcast has been launched by our own Thicket of Diversity researcher, Dr. Scott Solomon of Rice University. Wild World explores the natural wonders of our planet through the voices of the people who explore, study, and protect them. Each episode features a new location, from the caves of Madagascar to the volcanoes of the Galapagos Islands and the icy shores of Antarctica. The programs enable listeners to experience the wildest places on Earth (and beyond) and to come away with a new sense of wonder and awe about the natural world and the people who help us understand it.

The podcast is made possible through producer and audio wizards Todd Hulslander and Mark DiClaudio at 3WireCreative, logo designer Mark Railston at Alltheus.com, and sponsors Lindblad Expeditions and the Rice University Traveling Owls. Other partners include the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Smithsonian's Natural History Museum, and the Houston Zoo.

TO ACCESS:

Wild World website: <https://www.wildworldshow.com/>

Wild World on Apple Podcasts: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/wild-world-with-scott-solomon/id1665792613>

Wild World on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@wildworldpodcast>

Wild World on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/wildworldshow/>

Wild World on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/WildWorldShow>



MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Become a Big Thicket Association Volunteer

Help needed:

Thicket of Diversity Research,
Neches River Adventures

Environmental Education Tours
and Hikes, Big Thicket Events

Call: 409-790-5399

or email: Director@bigthicket.org

Volunteer Form Link:

<https://form.jotform.com/230656079017154>



Photo: Michael Black

Grayburg Black Cemetery Dedication

Mary Catherine Johnston, board member

Hidden in a back cow pasture lies a neglected and almost forgotten Black cemetery. Thanks to landowner John Floyd and Hardin County Historical Commission member Julie McDaniel, the location is now listed as a Historic Texas Cemetery and recognized as a Hardin County Historic Cemetery.

On April 20th, the Grayburg Black Cemetery 1916-1958 was dedicated. Participating in the ceremony were James A. McKim III, Chairman of the Hardin County Historical Commission, Renee Ellis and Reverend Clarence Russell. Red McDaniel and John Floyd provided four wheeler transportation to the site.

Julie McDaniel shared an insightful presentation on her passion to remember past souls and the research, inventory of graves, and marker application process that dominated her efforts. Impressively, in the past nine years Ms. McDaniel has photographed and documented 1800 graves.

Founded in 1908 as a Thompson-Ford sawmill town, Grayburg at its peak boasted a population of 2000. In recent years its size dwindled to approximately 315 residents. Despite limited remaining records, the determined historian identified 19 individuals laid to rest in the Grayburg Black Cemetery. Four of the deceased were recognized for their service in World War I. These included Joe Jackson (1893-1948), Leon Kelly (1892-1948), and Thomas Richard (1896-1958). Orlene Simmons (1889-1938) served in the 165 Depot Brigade and suffered gunshot wounds. Only nine headstones or fragments remain. Although cows are the main visitors to the site today, the stone markers, like pages in a book, tell a story.

Thanks to the diligence of Julie McDaniel and the Hardin County Historical Commission, a few of the town's past residents are remembered today and the existence of the Grayburg Black Cemetery is forever documented in the annals of Southeast Texas history.



Thrasher in the Thicket

Phoebe H. Dishman, board member, Bulletin editor

Gary Clark informs, “[Brown thrashers’] song repertoire consists of more than 1,100 melodies. That’s far more tunes than any other bird can sing—and even more than a mockingbird’s 250 melodies ... The brown thrasher only occasionally mimics the songs of other birds. It prefers singing original songs.”

Two close cousins: On the treetop the show-off mocker. In the understory the deep-thinking thrasher, whose series of reflections goes on, and on, and on. To me, their squeaky persistence is part of the charm. But don’t make them mad. A true story:

Crouched at my weeding, I look up to see a brown thrasher, quite close. We both freeze. She begins scolding. I back carefully away from her golden-eyed outrage. Next morning, before daylight, I’m at my desk in a pool of lamplight. Comes a “whomp” at the window. What the...? Startled eyes to the glass I see the responsible party scuttling across the patio. I consider myself warned.

Signature shape in the shadows. Chestnut beauty, thrashing in the leaf litter, scaring up some breakfast, guarding her circle of care, attending for the most part to her mate’s running commentary. What a grace to the Big Thicket, our backyards—the many places we see them, if we’re lucky.

“I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is mine.”

-Psalm 50:11



Painting by Isabelle Scurry Chapman



SAVE THE DATES

Neches River Adventures

Tour the Neches River's backwater channels into the Big Thicket National Preserve and the Port of Beaumont aboard the Ivory Bill. Public tours, private charters and school environmental education tours continue. Fees apply. Check online scheduling at www.nechesriveradventures.org for details.

Explore the Big Thicket

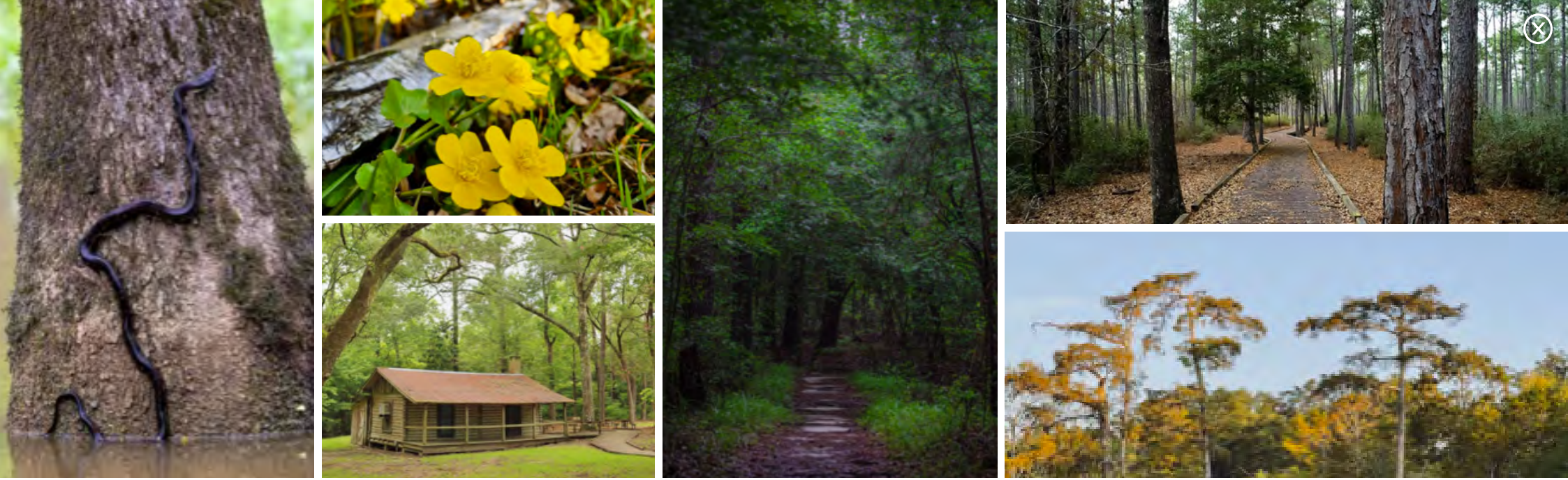
For activities in the Preserve this summer please see nps.gov/bith

Big Thicket Day Celebration and General Membership Meeting

October 7 at Collier's Ferry Park on the Neches, in Beaumont

PHOTO CONTEST: Scenes from the Big Thicket

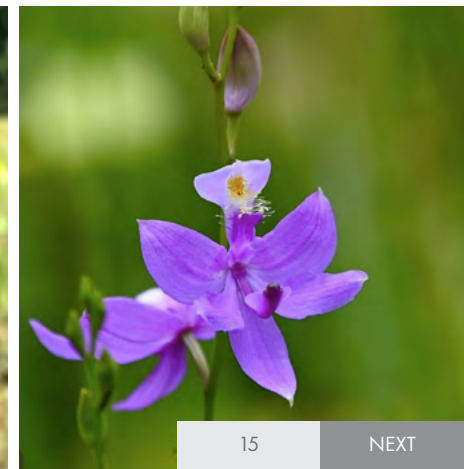
Get ready for our next quarterly photo contest! The theme will be "Scenes from the Big Thicket, Reptiles and Amphibians." Watch Big Thicket Association's website in early July for information about entering this fun contest. Winner receives four free passes for the Saturday Public Tour on the Ivory Bill.



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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