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President’s Note

The year is off to a great start. We have 20 enthusiastic new members enrolled in the 2025 Workshops. Now that spring has arrived, they will begin learning about the surrounding ecosystems. Head over to Track it Forward if you would like to come along.

Just a reminder to pay your membership dues and to log your volunteer hours on Track it Forward. You can pay your dues at the next general membership meeting or from the website (swlamasternaturalists.org) or Facebook page. There are many volunteer opportunities coming up in April and May. I hope you will be joining us.

We are receiving requests for presenters at events and schools. Please email me if you are interested in doing a presentation. I will contact you when I receive a request to see if you are available. It is best to have a presenter, and a helper involved.

Incorporate native plants into your landscape. Information can be found at www.Greauxnative.org. Doug Tallamy is encouraging native planting in a new initiative called, HOME GROWN NATIONAL PARKS. (homegrownnationalpark.org) Check out the website. It really makes sense and has many resources available for you.

Well, I hope to see you at the next general meeting. Be sure to renew your membership and log your volunteer hours.

See you out there!

Barbara Morris

President

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Louisiana Snapping Turtle and the Alligator Snapping Turtle

by Kayla Booth

The world of reptiles is filled with fascinating creatures; among them, turtles hold a special place. Two remarkable species that often draw attention are the Louisiana snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) and the alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*). While they share some similarities, these two turtles are distinct in several key aspects, including size, habitat, appearance, and diet. The Louisiana snapping turtle is generally smaller than its alligator counterpart. Typically, these turtles grow to lengths of 10 to 20 inches and can weigh up to around 35 pounds. Despite their smaller size, they are still robust and agile creatures.

Louisiana snapping turtles can be found in ponds, lakes, rivers, and swamps in freshwater environments. They are primarily located in the southeastern United States, with Louisiana being their namesake and a significant



Louisiana Snapping Turtle (Common Snapping Turtle; Chelydra serpentina)

stronghold for their populations. A more streamlined and elongated shell characterizes this species than the alligator snapping turtle. Their carapace is generally dark brown or olive and features less prominent ridges, giving them a sleeker profile. Their overall appearance is less rugged, contributing to their water agility. Louisiana snapping turtles are omnivorous, meaning they have a varied diet that includes aquatic plants, insects, fish, and small animals. This adaptability in feeding habits allows them to thrive in diverse environments, making them opportunistic feeders.



Alligator Snapping Turtle (Macrochelys temminckii)

In contrast, the alligator snapping turtle is one of the largest freshwater turtles in North America. Adult alligator snapping turtles typically measure

18 to 26 inches in length and can weigh anywhere from 100 to 200 pounds, with some individuals reaching even larger sizes. Their significant bulk is a defining feature of the species. Like their Louisiana relatives, alligator snapping turtles are also primarily found in the southeastern United States. However, they prefer deeper waters, often in rivers, lakes, and swamps. Their preference for these habitats is linked to their feeding and breeding behaviors.

Alligator snapping turtles are easily recognized by their rugged, heavily armored shells adorned with pronounced ridges. Their unique beak-like jaws enhance their predatory capabilities, allowing them to grasp slippery prey with ease. Additionally, they possess a distinctive worm-like appendage on their tongues, which they use as a lure to attract fish—an intriguing adaptation for hunting. Predominantly carnivorous, alligator snapping turtles primarily feast on fish but will also consume a variety of other aquatic creatures. Their powerful jaws and ambush tactics make them formidable hunters in their watery domains.



Art Weston and Kirk Kirkland caught this 200 lb. alligator snapping turtle in Sam Rayburn Lake in East Texas.

In summary, the Louisiana snapping turtle and the alligator snapping turtle are two distinct species, each showcasing unique traits that reflect their adaptations to different ecological niches. While the Louisiana snapping turtle is smaller, with a streamlined shell and an omnivorous diet, the alligator snapping turtle stands out with its impressive size, rugged appearance, and specialized hunting adaptations. Both species contribute to the rich biodiversity of their habitats and highlight the fascinating diversity within the world of turtles. Understanding these differences not only enhances our appreciation for these remarkable reptiles but also underscores the importance of their conservation in the wild.

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Overnight Longleaf Pine Workshop

May 17-18, Longleaf Pine Savannah Workshop is being held at the LEAF Center located at the former site of Hodges Gardens. This will be a great opportunity for participants to see how a Longleaf Pine Forest is managed with economically, ethically, and eco-friendly methods. There are only a few spots available for workshop helpers. You must sign up on Track it Forward to be considered.

Creole Nature Trail Adventure Point 10 Year Anniversary Celebration

This is a great volunteer opportunity! The Creole Nature Trail is holding its 10th anniversary at Adventure Point (2740 Ruth St, Sulphur) on May 3rd from 9 am until noon. Activities are family friendly and appeal to all ages. Attendees will get the chance to hold a live alligator, practice their fish casting, touch live mammals and reptiles, learn about birds and native plants and be a part of many other exciting activities. Join us for the celebration!

Native Plant Blooming Now



Shown on the right is a Louisiana Iris known as Abbeville Red or *Iris nelsonii*. LA Irises grow from rhizomes, underground stems that store food, and they thrive in moist soils. They prefer full sun and go dormant in the heat of the summer. They begin leafing out in the late fall, to bloom again in the spring.

Take a Kid Fishing

Sam Houston Jones State Park

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Aquatic VIP program will host an event on May 10th in Sam Houston Jones State Park along the riverfront pavilion area to educate young anglers on fishing rules and safety. There will be instructional and hands-on demonstrations of casting, hook safety, and fish identification. This is another great opportunity to get volunteer hours! Contact Lori Marinovich to volunteer.

Calendar

April

 20 Easter

 26 [Workshop 8: Coastal Ecosystem](#)

May

 3 [Workshop 9: Reptiles and Amphibians](#)

 3 Creole Nature Trail Adventure Point 10
Year Anniversary Celebration

 10 Family Fish Day Sam Houston Jones
State Park, Hosted by SLAMN

 17-18 [Workshop 10: Longleaf Pine Ecosystem](#)

 31 Nature in Focus Birds tentative date

June

 4 Board Meeting

 7 [Workshop 11: Aquatic Invertebrates](#)

 14 [Workshop 12: The Land Ethic, Outreach
and Graduation](#)

 19 Guided Walk, Sam Houston

July

 9 General Meeting

 12 Field Trip

September

 3 Board Meeting

 18 Guided Walk, Sam Houston

 20 Beach Sweep Lakeshore Drive

October

 1 General Meeting

 11 Family Fun Day

November

 20 Guided walk, Sam Houston

December

 3 Board Meeting

 18 Guided Walk
