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President’s Note

Greetings Master Naturalists,

Spring went by too quickly. Already we are enjoying the hot summer days, on the water or in the woods. Just as quickly, we will move into fall and a new year. There is a lot that will be going on this fall.

There are only three workshops remaining before our latest class is finished and this wonderful group of naturalists will complete their transition into being certified Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists! The final class, July 13, will be in conjunction with our quarterly club meeting at AG Center. Please come out and meet our new members.

In September, we will ask for nominations of members to take a place on the Board. Patty Palmer is looking for someone to fill the position of Secretary. We always have committee volunteer positions open, including the Rendezvous 2023 Committee.

Rendezvous 2023 will be held in SWLA. We need your help to make this the best Rendezvous ever!!

SLAMN is offering a new Associate Membership status. This entitles your friends and loved ones to come to meetings, field trips, and help in sharing information about the natural world. More information is included in this publication.

Sam Houston Jones State Park has reopened and needs volunteers to help with educational events and workdays. Lori Marinovich is our liaison to Friends of Sam Houston Jones State Park. I hope you will come out to help when an event is sponsored.

T-shirts with the new logo will be available at the next meeting for only \$15. Membership renewal is only \$15 annually from January to January. Payment can now be made online at swlamasternaturalists.org. Are your dues up to date?

We are always looking for suggestions. Who do you know? Where do you want to go? What can you offer us? Do you want to lead a workshop or hike? Please let us know.

The website at swlamasternaturalists.org is being revised by James Doucet. I hope you will continue to follow Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists on Facebook. If you are not receiving emails from SLAMN, check your SPAM folder.

A famous person once said, "Don't Retire, Rewire!" What are you going to do with this time of your life? I like to say, "Come outside and Play"! I hope you will join us.

Barbara Morris, President SWLA Master Naturalists

FYI – Local Events

The Gulf Coast Bird Club would like to remind you of their Monthly Beginners Birdwalks:
June 25, July 23 and August 27 at Sam Houston Jones State Park from 8 am to 9:30.

Rendezvous 2023

This is a reminder that the Louisiana Master Naturalist Rendezvous 2023 will be held in SWLA April 21-23. The SWLA Master Naturalists are hosting this Rendezvous. If you have ideas, or would like to be involved, please contact Barbara Morris.



City Nature Challenge Southwest Louisiana

April 29-May 2, 2022

The City Nature Challenge 2022 is about people documenting observations of the wildlife and plant life in city areas using iNaturalist. Southwest Louisiana has participated since 2017. Scientists utilize the data collected for a variety of purposes. If you have not already done so, you should have a look at the webpage. You can search by area, taxonomy, or specific species. Below are the results for 2022.



The stats for the City Nature Challenge this year for Southwest Louisiana is as follows:

Observations	Species	Identifiers	Observers
1,114	558	178	74



Photo by James Doucet

Naturalists in Southwest Louisiana encountered some unique sightings and some common ones.

James Doucet documented a Pseudoscorpion pictured on the left.

White Clover (*Trifolium repens*), pictured on the right, was most observed in our area. ♦



Photo by Lori Marinovich

Mushroom Foray

by Barbara Morris

Collecting Mushrooms in Bleakwood with David Lewis

June 11, 2022

It was hot and it was dry. But under the canopy of the trees, it was pleasant. James Doucet, Beth Kramer, and Barbara Morris headed to Bleakwood, TX for a Mushroom Foray with David Lewis and Gulf State Mycology Society. (gsymco.org) We were joined by about 12 participants.

David owns 60 acres of mixed forest near Bleakwood, TX. His house is tucked into a quiet cove. We began the walk with a tutorial about an *Amanita phalloides*, Death Cap Mushroom, which has an unusually strong scent. The group walked through the understory, eyes to the ground. We located quite a few *Lactarius* sp. and *Russula* sp. James spotted an interesting ant and gave us a tutorial. He knows a lot about ants. Beth took quite a few pictures of interesting plants.



David Lewis describing Amanita Mushroom



SLAMN Member James Doucet exploring Ants

After collecting, we returned to the house, sorted and identified the fungi. It was a fun day.

I hope you will check out the GSMS website and join the group. They have two official Forays per year and many pop-up events. If you are interested in mushrooms, you should be involved with this group. ♦



Amanita Mushroom



SLAMN Member Beth Kramer with walking stick

Damsely in Distress

Contributed by Kathleen Simon



As I drifted along the quiet waterway in my kayak, I noticed him struggling in the water. A damselfly in distress. I paddled over, scooped him up and set him gently on my jeans to dry out. Feeling pleased with myself for saving this little guy, I continued on my mission, hoping to snag a bass. After only a few minutes, my damselfly friend, dry and recharged, moved up to my arm, paused as if to say thank you, then lifted up into the breeze. As I watched him go, wishing him well, a tree swallow swooped down and ate him. Alas, the food chain claimed another life but perhaps this was his purpose all along.

My dragonfly fascination started as a kid. Mosquito hawks, as I knew them, would perch on the hurricane fence. I would creep up on them slowly and carefully and grab them by the wings. After a close inspection and often after being bitten, I

would release them and start again. Sometimes I would attempt to feed one of these creatures to a box turtle that I had also imprisoned. The turtles would never eat my live offering and eventually all would be set free. My fascination now consists of observing these little flyers from a shady spot in the yard and occasionally saving one from a watery demise.

In the last few years, I have “gone native” with my yard design in an effort to create a healthy habitat for birds. This entails avoiding the use of lawn chemicals and pesticides, adding plants that are native to our area and maintaining a water source for birds, insects, and other wildlife. Now that I have a self-imposed, cease and desist order on the chemical spray for mosquitoes, I am working to build up a natural protection from these disease carrying pests. Enter the dragonfly. Upon doing a little reading, I was surprised to learn most insects, dragonflies included, only live to reproduce. Perhaps if humans functioned this way our world would be more harmonious. But I digress.

The dragonfly lays its eggs in water and once hatched, the little nymph lives in this habitat anywhere from one month to five years. Surprisingly, the nymph can outlive the adult, which only live a few months. The adult dragonfly eats 100 or more mosquitos per day while their young, the larvae, feed on mosquito larvae and other aquatic prey. The order Odonata is doing double duty on the mosquito population. This makes the dragonfly a major player in mosquito control, along with many other backyard creatures including birds, bats, and damselflies. So, create a backyard that sustains life, starting with a healthy habitat for insects. Like my favorite Kevin Costner movie touts, “if you build it, they will come.”

For more information on building a backyard habitat for dragonflies go to www.flowerchick.com and lookup the article titled 12 Plants to Attract Dragonflies to Your Garden. A second option is How to Create a Dragonfly Garden at treehugger.com. ◇

Hummingbird Facts and Trivia

Contributed by David Booth

1. The hummingbird family is Trochilidae which means 'small birds'.
2. They are the smallest of living birds.
3. The smallest is the Bee Hummingbird of Cuba, only 2.2 inches long counting its beak.
4. The largest hummer is the Giant Hummingbird of South America and it is 9 inches long.
5. They are remarkable flyers and are the only birds that can fly backwards.
6. There are almost 350 species of hummers in the Americas. None anywhere else.
7. The Andean Hillstar roosts and nests in Andean caves due to the cold temperatures.
8. Hummingbird physiology is amazing:
 - a. Has 80 wingbeats per second in normal flight and up to 200 bps in dives.
 - b. Has speeds of 35 mph up to 60 mph in dives.
 - c. Heart rates are 225 at rest and 1,200 beats per minute in flights.
 - d. Takes breaths of 250 per minute.
 - e. Most weigh 3 to 4 grams, less than one teaspoon of sugar.
 - f. There are 150 Ruby-throated hummingbirds in one pound.
9. The hummingbirds have keen eyesight, good memories, and no sense of smell.
10. They eat $\frac{1}{2}$ their weight per day feeding 5-8 times per hour.
11. They do not suck nectar. They lick using a 'W' shaped tongue tip.
12. They can lick at a rate of 10-15 licks per second!
13. They cannot walk or hop. They can scoot sideways while perched.
14. They have 900 feathers. This is the fewest of all the birds.
15. My wife says they don't know how to do anything slowly.
16. Most important, they hum because they forgot the words to the songs.◊

*Ruby-throated hummingbird*

The Monarch and the Milkweed

Contributed by Angie Roques

Is that really what I see? I can't believe my eyes! It's a striking black, yellow, and white monarch caterpillar! After two years of hoping to see at least part of the life cycle of the butterfly on the milkweed plant, here it is.

How important is the milkweed plant to a monarch butterfly? This is the only host plant in which this butterfly lays eggs. The egg is very small, so I did miss seeing that part of the life cycle. After hatching, the caterpillar or larva starts munching on the leaves. Each day I checked on it like a mother hen.

The pupa stage comes next. It is a beautiful green capsule hanging from the leaf speckled with gold dots. Nature provided the green camouflage, and that is a crafty method to not be eaten. After about one week, the pupa becomes transparent, and a beautiful orange and black butterfly emerges. Since the wings need to dry before flying, I was able to closely observe the black head with white dots. Never have I been so close to a live butterfly—so exciting. Of course, my family was forced to come running to see this. At the next check two hours



Monarch Caterpillar on Milkweed

later, the monarch was sipping nectar from the milkweed flower. As I inched forward for closer observation, off it flew. I feel so fortunate to have seen this wonder of nature.

Unfortunately, we are killing the milkweed plants in our landscapes and agricultural lands. This has caused a population decline for these butterflies. If the milkweed plants are lost, no more monarchs and one less amazing creature in the world. That is a sad thought. The good news is that we can easily plant the milkweed, but make sure it is a native variety.

As people need each other on this big blue planet, so do monarchs need the milkweed plant. So go out and get your hands dirty and get planting. ♦



Newly Hatched Monarch Butterfly

Specialist Eaters

Contributed by Pam Langley

Fourteen years ago, when I started the Master Gardener training program, I spent many hours learning 'good bug versus bad bug'. At that time, I was learning IPM, Integrated Pest Management, also. Since that time, I've come to the conclusion that we (mankind) cannot survive without insects, so all insects are 'good bugs'. Well, maybe except for the leaf footed stink bug.

About that same time, my garden club was involved in planting pollinator gardens. We focused on planting things that bloomed and produced pollen. Not much attention was paid to whether the plant was native to our area or not. We mainly attracted honeybees and were happy to get them. As time progressed, we started focusing on some native plant species to attract native bees. I've noticed that lots of native bees like common sunflower (pic on right).



Mason bee on common sunflower

Three years ago, I went through the Master Naturalist program and was introduced to the books of Doug Tallamy, and my eyes were opened even more. I began to realize that many insects are specialist eaters, meaning they only eat certain plants. According to Tallamy, about half of all insects are herbivores, and about 70 percent of all herbivores are specialists that are only capable of feeding on a narrow range of plants. We are all familiar with the Monarch butterfly caterpillar that only eats milkweed, and our state butterfly, the Gulf Fritillary, caterpillar specializes in eating passion vine. But there are many more specialist eaters among our native insects.

Tallamy also points out that most of our landscape plants have historically been imported from other countries. For example, *Camillia japonica* comes from Japan, *Rhododendron indicum* (azalea) also comes from Japan, and *Lagerstroemia indica* (crepe myrtle) comes from India. These are three of the common historical plants in our area that everyone just assumes are native, but they are not. I cannot ever remember seeing a Camillia, crepe myrtle, or azalea leaf being chomped on by a caterpillar. Tallamy accredits this to the fact that caterpillars of our local moths and butterflies are not capable of processing the chemicals found in these plants, since they did not evolve together. If you look at a typical traditional yard in our area, there are very few plants that our native insects can eat.

Keeping in mind that I'm of firm belief that man cannot survive without insects and our native insects need native plants to eat, it's logical that I have turned to planting mostly native plants in my yard. Now, when I first started planting natives, most of my neighbors referred to them as weeds. At that time, I was choosy about what weed I planted, but recently, I've begun to re-think my choices.

I used to choose natives based on what looked nice in the yard and which ones bloomed nicely. But I've noticed that some of those nice-looking natives feed very few insects. So just planting native plants doesn't seem like quite enough to help our environment. We need to do research on which natives provide food for our native insects. Since information on what insects eat what plants can sometimes be hard to find, I've started making my own notes on which plants get eaten at a faster rate than others.

One that really surprised me was a volunteer plant that I noticed growing in my flower bed early this spring. I considered pulling it, because I hadn't planted it, but then reconsidered. If it had come up on its own, and I hadn't noticed any of it growing close to my yard, then the seed probably was dropped by a bird, squirrel, or some such animal. That made me think that it had some redeeming value. Recently I noticed that this plant was the most bug eaten of all the other plants in my flower bed. When I first approached it, there were at least three assassin bugs on the plant. That means they were munching on something that apparently was abundant on the plant. I took some photos and set about trying to identify the plant. Online sources were of little help, probably because the leaves were in such poor shape. It looked like it was in the nightshade family, so I looked that up in Dr. Allen's native wildflower book. I think the correct ID is Black Nightshade or *Solanum americanum* in botanical terms.



Flower and bug eaten leaves of Black Nightshade



Assassin bug on black nightshade plant

I was excited that the plant seemed to be feeding lots of leaf munching insects but was confused in that I hadn't seen any insects on the plant except for the assassin bugs. I returned the next day earlier in the day to escape the heat and noticed several bugs on the plant, but they were all the same kind. A search on Bug Guide and I found the bug was *Lema solani*. This bug is common throughout the southeastern part of the U.S. and is a specialist eater. They only eat plants that are in the nightshade family!

So, it turns out that my new-found weed, *Solanum americanum*, is mainly feeding just one specialist insect, *Lema solani*. But the assassin bugs seem to be feasting on them, so I'm happy that I'm able to

support one step in the chain. I'm sure there are other critters that munch on assassin bugs. Come to think of it, I've noticed several small toads in and around the flowerbeds recently. Maybe they eat assassin bugs?

Some local plants that I have found to really draw insects are common sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*), mealy cup sage (*Salvia farinacea*), goldenrod (*Solidago*), and even though it is not native to our area, pentas (*Pentas lanceolata*) draw all sorts of insects.

The moral of the story is that we cannot limit our scope of attention to certain plants and animals. We need to expand to include all of mother nature's wonders. We so often get sidetracked by the ever-growing hype about honeybees, pollinators, and monarch butterflies. Yes, these are important, but ALL other insects are important also. Well maybe except for the leaf footed stink bug.



Lema Solani

Resources:

Bringing Nature Home, by Douglas W. Tallamy, 2007, Timber Press.

Natures Best Hope, by Douglas W. Tallamy, 2019, Timber Press.

Louisiana Wildflower Guide, by Charles Allen, Kenneth Wilson, Harry Winters, 2010, Allen's Native Ventures, LLC.

Bug Guide: <https://bugguide.net/node/view/40978> accessed 5/13/2022.

USGS Plants of Louisiana: <https://warcapps.usgs.gov/PlantID/> accessed 5/13/2022 ♦

New SLAMN T-Shirts Available

If you haven't gotten your new SLAMN T-Shirt, now is the time to get one or two! The shirt is pictured on the right, modeled so professionally by Tom Morris. The shirt is tan in color and has our new logo on the front. Shirts are \$15 each and sizes available are S to 3XL.

Contact Barbara Morris to get your new t-shirt.

Show your support of the organization by buying and wearing the SLAMN T-Shirt!



Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks

Contributed by Brenda LaFleur

Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park has been on my “bucket list” for many years and last fall my husband, David, and I finally made the trip. We had initially planned to fly from Lake Charles to Bozeman, Montana. David’s brother and his wife live in Bozeman, so our first stop was going to be a few nights with them before we headed into the parks. The spike in Covid outbreaks last August and September changed our plans and we decided to drive instead. In case you did not know, it’s a LONG way from Lake Charles to Montana! Other destinations on my wish list were Badlands National Park and Custer State Park, both of which are in proximity of each other in SW South Dakota. South Dakota seemed like only a short detour (wink, wink) on our trip, so we headed there first and moved our family visit to the end of the trip after spending eight days visiting Badlands NP, Custer State Park, Yellowstone NP and Grand Tetons NP.

I had planned our itinerary to arrive in Badlands NP in late afternoon which would provide the best light for viewing landscapes and wildlife, as well as ideal light for photography. I should point out; photography fuels my travel plans so I’m all about visiting places that provide the best in photography locations. Both Badlands and Custer SP met my criteria without a doubt.

Badlands National Park contains one of the world's richest fossil beds, permitting scientists to study the evolution of many mammal species. Ancient horses and rhinos once roamed there. From tiny shrews to 2,000-pound bison, the Badlands is home to many species of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and butterflies. The rugged landscape is a landscape and wildlife photographer’s dream.

Landscape views of Badlands NP:



Wildlife from Badlands and Custer State Park:



Weather forecasts predicted snow on Sunday, September 19, 2021, our day to enter Yellowstone along the Beartooth Highway which is a 68 mile scenic highway beginning on the east side of the Park just outside the mountain town of Red Lodge, MT. The Beartooth Highway ends a short distance from the east entrance into Yellowstone, near Cooke City, Mt. We were concerned about traveling over the high mountain passes on the Beartooth Highway in inclement weather, but the travel gods were with us and we only saw mild snow flurries at the highest locations along the road. The Beartooth Highway is a National Scenic Byway's "All-American Road," which climbs 5,000 feet through lodgepole pine forests leading you to an enchanting world made of alpine lakes and 20 peaks over 12,000 feet. Read more about it here: <https://www.yellowstonepark.com/road-trips/scenic-drives/beartooth-highway-scenic-drive/>

Beartooth Highway:



Snow did catch up with us as we made our way through Yellowstone. Yikes!

We were slowed by snow and bison traffic jams, as is the norm in Yellowstone.



I really enjoyed the opportunity to shoot (camera click kind) bison in the snow. Really, an amazing experience for this Louisiana girl.



There were elk everywhere:



Grant Teton National Park is definitely worth the drive down from Yellowstone. The two National Parks are only 31 miles apart. The scenery in GTNP was exceptional on the day we visited. Here are a few of my favorite images. Even a MOOSE!!





No discussion about Yellowstone is complete without mentioning half the world's hydrothermal features are found in Yellowstone. There are more than 10,000 hydrothermal features in Yellowstone. The four types of thermal features are geysers, hot springs, mud pots, and fumaroles. There are more than 500 active geysers in Yellowstone NP. Heat flow deep inside the earth beneath Yellowstone is the driving force behind all of these features.





Other interesting facts about Yellowstone National Park:

- It covers over 2.2 million acres
- There are about 290 waterfalls in the park
- Yellowstone is home to the largest concentration of mammals in the lower 48. Yellowstone's wildlife is abundant and diverse with an estimated 300 species of birds, 16 types of fish and 67 species of mammals — the largest number of mammal species in the contiguous United States.
- Yellowstone is a supervolcano. One of the world's largest active volcanoes lies beneath Yellowstone. The first major eruption of the Yellowstone volcano occurred 2.1 million years ago and covered more than 5,790 square miles with ash. That's among the largest volcanic eruptions known, and marks Yellowstone as a supervolcano (a term used to describe any volcano with an eruption of more than 240 cubic miles of magma). While the volcano is still active, it's been about 70,000 years since the last lava flow.

So the major point here is Go! Visit these magnificent National Parks. Although Yellowstone and Grand Tetons are two of the busiest parks, especially in prime months, we didn't experience any major difficulty navigating the park and seeing all there is to see. As we all know, when your goal is to observe wildlife – get out early and stay out late. Fortunately, the same rule applies to good photographic opportunities! Here is the link to my travel website gallery with more pics of my trip. Make yourself comfortable, there are a few!

https://pbase.com/blaf/yellowstone_gtnp_september_2021

Some links of interest:

An article about Yellowstone's geysers <https://yellowstone.net/geysers/>

Interesting facts about Yellowstone: <https://www.travelandleisure.com/trip-ideas/national-parks/yellowstone-national-park-facts>

Official National Park Service website Yellowstone: [nps.gov/yell/index.htm](https://www.nps.gov/yell/index.htm)

Official National Park Service website Grand Tetons: <https://www.nps.gov/grte/index.htm>

Official National Park Service website Badlands: <https://www.nps.gov/badl/index.htm>

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Upcoming SLAMN Events

● General Meeting

Wednesday July 13, 2022

Location: AG Center

Time: 5:30 Social 6:00 Meeting

Come and meet the graduating class.

● Field Trip

Saturday July 16

Kathleen Simon has invited us to her Camp which is located in Deatonville, off Big Lake Road. Address is 3691 Lake View Dr., Lake Charles, 70605. Come out early (9am) and enjoy birding, crabbing, fishing, and/or kayaking. Family and Friends are welcome to attend. We will grill hamburgers at 11:00. You are welcome to bring a food to share. Please sign up on Track it Forward if possible.



Camp at Deatonville

SLAMN CALENDAR

June 4	Workshop 10 Riverine Ecology and Fish
June 8	Board Meeting
June 11	Mushroom walk in East Texas (See Upcoming Events for details)
June 18	Workshop 11 Backyard Habitat/Land Ethic
July 13	Outreach/Graduation 5:30 pm AG Center
July 13	General Meeting Social 5:30 Meeting 6:00
July 16	Field Trip – Kathleen Simon’s Camp at Deatonville
September 7	Board Meeting Nominations accepted for Board and Committee positions
October 5	General meeting Election of Board Members and Committee assignments
October 8	Field Trip Maxwell Prairie, Eunice Cajun Prairie