

Nature Notes



Leafcutter Bees Come Calling

story by Connie Blakley

photos by Calvin Blakley

Most of us are familiar with leafcutter ants, but how many are lucky enough to have seen leafcutter bees. Calvin discovered them last summer building a nest in a wind chime on our patio. After doing some research, he decided to build a bee house and every hole was occupied within a short time.

Leafcutter bees (family Megachilidae) are important pollinators of wildflowers, fruits and vegetables. They use the leaves of broadleaf deciduous plants—redbuds are a favorite—and are known for cutting circular or oval holes to construct their cigar-like nests in soil, in holes in wood, and in hollow plant stems. Mama bee fills each nest cell with food (pollen or a pollen/nectar mix), lays a single egg, then plugs the hole with more leaf matter. When fully grown,

newly formed adults usually overwinter in the nest, chewing their way out the following spring.

Leafcutters are solitary bees, not overly aggressive, and will only sting if handled. They are also efficient pollinators due to the frequency with which they visit plants. This makes them a favorite among commercial growers.

If you're interested in building your own bee house (see photo above), all you need is a piece of wood and a drill. Drill various sized holes, anywhere from 3/16 to 1/2 inch diameter and varying depths, and hang the house under an eave to protect it from rain. When you notice the bees, try to locate their leaf source and you can easily observe mama bee as she industriously cuts her nesting materials. Soon, you too will be raising bees!

Group Activities — May/June

All meetings at Bayland Community Center unless noted

ONC Contacts

ONC General Information

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Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary

Aaron Stoley
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Ornithology Group (OG)

Pam Smolen
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Adam Wood (Field Trips)
713-515-1692

ONC Planning Meeting

JUNE 10, 7:00 pm

Please join us to plan programs and activities for the 2010–2011 season.

Botany/Entomology

MAY 11, 7:30 pm

The Watson Plant Preserve of the Big Thicket, by Pauline Singleton. The Watson preserve in East Texas harbors many native plant species, some of which are rare.

May 2010						
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9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Ornithology (OG)

MAY 3 : OG Meeting

6:30 Learning Corner

7:00 Program

Summer on the Katy Prairie, by Bob Honig. Summer birdwatching can be very rewarding as we will learn from Bob Honig. Bob is a board member of the Katy Prairie Conservancy, a land trust that has protected roughly 18,000 acres of the Katy Prairie west of Houston. Learn about some of the summer birdwatching opportunities on the Katy Prairie, some interesting facts about our summer Upper Texas Coast birds, and get an update on KPC's activities.

MAY 15 : OG Field Trip to Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary

See map below for directions. Details about this trip available at OG's website (www.ornithologygroup.org).

June 2010						
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ONC Meeting

MAY 13

7:00 pm Refreshments

7:30 pm Program

Spiders I Have Known and Loved ... or all my girlfriends have 8 legs, by Cletus Lee. Mr. Lee is an amateur arachnologist and resides in Bellaire. In 2008 he retired from a career in the oil & gas industry to pursue his love of nature photography. His program and beautiful photographs will focus on spiders of the Texas Gulf Coast area.

Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary

MAY 15-16, Visitors Weekend & SPRING FEAST

Join us for a fun-filled weekend in the woods. Lots of activities are planned for this weekend; details below.

Saturday, May 15: SPRING FEAST Potluck Lunch, 12:30 pm

Our annual potluck lunch at LTNS is a popular event. Bring your favorite covered dish and utensils. Plates,

napkins, and drinks provided by the club. After lunch, join us for a bird walk or plant walk. Primitive camping is allowed in the Cove on Saturday night—no electricity or water—bring your own!

Saturday, May 15: OG Birding Field Trip at LTNS, 8:00 am

Join the Ornithology Group for a bird walk led by Adam Wood. Meet in the Cove at 8:00 am. Birds at LTNS in summer are more commonly heard than seen, so come prepared to learn and practice your bird-by-ear skills.

JUNE activities at LTNS

Saturday, June 19

Adopt-a-Road Pickup, 8:30 am Botany Field Trip, 9:30 am

Trash pickup will begin at 8:30 and takes about an hour. Afterwards, there will be tractor rides to the meadows in search of summer wildflowers. Bluebells should be in full bloom. Bring the usual: hat, gloves, water, insect repellent, lunch.

**Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet (at Hillcroft)**



**Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary
2001 FM 945, Cleveland, TX**



Other Notes of Interest

(Submit news and articles to editor – see back page for contact info)

ONC Appreciates Your Donations

Donations to ONC are always appreciated and gratefully acknowledged. Memorials and Honor Gifts are used to support Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary or to fund special projects as designated by the donor. Thanks, everyone, for your generosity.

In memory of John Tveten

*Walt & Carolyn Hesson
David & Iris Poteet
Barbara Neal*

For ONC General Fund

*Virginia Anderson
Bill Godley
William & Kathryn Medford*

For LTNS Sanctuary Fund

Don Verser

Life Member

Don Verser



Notes from Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS)

Our spring highway trash pickup coincided with the state-wide Texas Trash-Off on April 10 and we had a fantastic turnout and a beautiful spring day. Volunteers who picked up trash were: Thomas/Gina Autry, Calvin/Connie Blakley, Leland Day, Cissy Donaldson, Sergio/Wanda Henao, Kellene Jarratt, Charles/Wanda Smith, and Aaron/Karen Stoley.

After the work, everyone enjoyed walking the trails and photographing the bluebonnets on Kings Hill and the wild azaleas at Little Jordan and Enchanted Isle. After lunch, we took a tractor ride to Cullinan and Big Meadows and found nestlings or eggs in five of the bird boxes.

The Memorial Garden at the Cove was cleared and trimmed in March by Stoleys and Blakleys. One can now walk into the garden and enjoy the abundant may apples, green dragons, and silver bell trees growing there.

Both Cullinan and Big Meadows have been mowed this

spring (thanks to Calvin Blakley and Aaron Stoley) and we found an abundance of bluebell plants. We're hoping for a record number of blooms this year for the Botany Group filed trip in June (see page 2).

Germination Workshop Thursday, May 12, 3:30 pm

ONC is partnering with Houston Audubon to host a Native Plant Germination Workshop to grow native wildflowers and grasses for local coastal prairie restoration projects. Flo Hannah, Sr. Sanctuary Steward for Houston Audubon, will bring all the materials: folding tables, dirt, germination flats and trays, mesh netting and tape to keep the squirrels and birds out of the flats, gloves, plant labels, markers, and most importantly, native seed. You only need to come and participate. The workshop will be at Stoleys home and is limited to 12 participants. Please reserve a spot by emailing or calling Flo Hannah (fhannah@houstonaudubon.org) or phone 713 932-1639, ext 105.

Dick Whanger to be honored with Greenbelt Award at May meeting

At the May 13 ONC meeting, the Greenbelt Award will be presented to Dick Whanger. His wide-ranging services in behalf of nature and environmental education may not be known by all his colleagues, but his work as ONC's ambassador to the Houston community is well known to many local organizations who have benefitted from his presentations. Dick has presented nature programs to schools, church groups, garden clubs, and other groups desirous of learning about our natural world, many of whom have given a "thank you" donation to ONC.

Dick was an active member of ONC's Photography Group and willingly shared his beautiful photos at most meetings. Using his photographs and knowledge of the subject matter, Dick has prepared and presented programs on birds, shells, bird nests, snakes and wildflowers. In his own estimate, he has presented programs to about 12,000 people since he began in 1992.

Please join us at the May 13 meeting to recognize Dick's contribution to our club and community, and to say "thank you" for his dedication and years of service.



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our charter...

A nonprofit educational and scientific organization established in 1923 to protect and conserve natural resources by fostering an interest in nature study.

Field Trip to Smith Woods ... a weekend in paradise!

A great adventure awaited those who traveled to Comesneil, Texas, for the April field trip to Charlie and Wanda Smith's new home in the pineywoods of East Texas. Many of us enjoyed hiking the trails constructed by the Smiths through 75 acres of forest. Others enjoyed relaxing on the back porch which overlooks a two-acre pond.

For Saturday's potluck lunch there was food enough for several meals, thoroughly enjoyed by all. After lunch another hike in the woods helped relieve the misery of overeating. Friday and Saturday evenings, the treefrogs entertained with a long and loud chorus. We also set up a moth light which seemed to attract more insects than moths, and we went spider hunting with our headlamps. It's amazing how many spiders lurk in the grasses at night!

Thank you, Charlie and Wanda, for inviting us to your East Texas paradise and for your hospitality. Good friends, good food, beautiful setting — perfect weekend!



Trekkers through Smith Woods were taught by botanist Charles Peterson (front right) how to identify native trees. Those observing were (left to right) Aaron Stoley, Leland Day, Peggy Boston, Mary Jane McCartney, Karen Stoley, Wanda Smith, Charles Smith, and Carlos Hernandez. [Photo by Helen Davis January]

