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# Mississippi Master Naturalist Newsletter

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## Editor's Corner

I hope that everyone had a wonderful summer. The days are finally getting a little shorter and the nights are beginning to cool down. Wildlife has begun to prepare for the winter and the trees are starting to change colors, shedding their leaves in preparation for dormancy. I hope that you enjoyed this year's Master Naturalist Class. I just got back from the Alliance of Natural Resource Outreach and Service Programs annual meeting that was held in New Braunfels, Texas. It is a very beautiful area of the country, especially in the spring (Bluebonnet, Texas State Flower). I was able to take a tour of Natural Bridge Caverns and canoe down the Guadeloupe River with program coordinators from other states to discuss different ways to teach citizens how to enjoy nature. Some of the other tours were actually led by Texas Master Naturalists. I learned that there are now more than 25 states with programs or are in the planning stages of having a Master Naturalist Program. I was able to network and gain a lot of useful information on how to develop our program into a sustainable statewide program. Mississippi is a part of the National Master Naturalist Program that has a goal of teaching the public about why we need to protect and enjoy our natural resources. I am planning to order the national pins, which you will receive after completion of 40 hours of Volunteer Service and 8 hours of advanced training. Hopefully the fall weather is here to stay. I am looking forward to working with you to complete your certification.

We welcome relevant contributions, photos, announcements or other material relating to the mission of the Mississippi Master Naturalist Program that will be published in the January, 2009 newsletter. Please send information to Chris Boyd [cboyd@ext.msstate.edu](mailto:cboyd@ext.msstate.edu) by December 15, 2008.

## Fall Events

### Advanced Training Opportunities

Mississippi Master Naturalist Program Reunion, October 15, 2008, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm @ the Coastal Research and Extension Center please RSVP to [cboyd@ext.msstate.edu](mailto:cboyd@ext.msstate.edu) by October 13, 2008.

Longleaf Ecosystem Workshop, October 18, 2008 at 8:30 a.m., Hancock County.  
Contact Nancy Freeman at 228-865-4227 for more information.

Mississippi-Alabama Bays and Bayous Symposium, October 28-29. Early registration has been extended until October 15, 2008. For more information go to the following website:  
<http://www.masgc.org/page.asp?id=210>

Hancock/Harrison County Wildlife and Forestry Association Annual Meeting, December 4, 2008.  
Contact Nancy Freeman at 228-865-4227 for more information.

### Volunteer Opportunities

Mullet Fest, October 18, 2008 @ Scranton Nature Center. Contact Donna Holifield at 228-938-6612

Crane Festival, October 25<sup>th</sup>; contact Stephanie Douglas at 228-769-3047

Mississippi Coastal Clean Up has been rescheduled for October 18, 2008. For more information to go the following website: <http://www.masgc.org/cleanup/index.htm>

“Share the Beach”, <http://www.alabamaseaturtles.com/volunteering/>

Phytoplankton Monitoring Network, for more information go to the following website: <http://www.chbr.noaa.gov/PMN/>



## The Importance of Maintaining Healthy Watersheds

By: Dr. Chris Boyd

As the coastal zone population continues to grow, we need to make sure to protect the health of our watersheds. More than half of America's population lives within coastal counties. The increasing urbanization of our coastal communities leads to the loss of habitats such as wetlands, savannas, forests, and natural areas that perform essential ecological services for maintaining healthy watersheds. Some of the ecological services that are accomplished by watersheds are storm buffering capacity, nutrient cycling, and providing habitat for aquatic and terrestrial organisms. Watersheds receive water from upstream sources such as tributaries, ditches, parking lots, and all other water sources that drain down gradient after rain events. As a society we need to make sure that future housing and industrial development is performed in such a way that minimizes environmental impacts to our watersheds.

Erosion is a serious issue in southern Mississippi. If you ride through the countryside, you will notice a lot of erosion occurring on barren, undeveloped land, and also in new neighborhoods. There are three types of water erosion: sheet, rill, and gully. Land slip and wind erosion also occur. Wind erosion occurs quite often on Highway 90. That is why planting coastal wetland grasses such as *Spartina alterniflora* (smooth cordgrass), *Spartina patens* (marshhay cordgrass) and dune grasses such as *Uniola paniculata* (sea oats) and *Panicum amarum* (panic grass) on the beach is good to prevent sand from being blown onto the highway. We need to prevent excessive sediment from entering our small conveyance channels, streams, lakes, rivers, and ultimately the Gulf of Mexico. With excessive erosion rates the water quality of these water bodies deteriorates. If too much sediment enters streams it can smother benthic and aquatic organisms and affect stream flow.

Land use planning needs to be better organized between cities and counties. Contractors should always be encouraged to follow best management practices such as: minimize the area to be disturbed, use erosion control plantings at every opportunity, implement sediment control measures to minimize sediment leaving the construction site, make sure to prepare extra erosion control practices in areas in close proximity to streams, use recommend plant material and planting rates, and maintain erosion control practices by routinely inspecting sites.

As a homeowner we can do our part to maintain healthy watersheds by trying to prevent non-point source pollution on our land along with educating the public about the importance of watersheds. Non-point source pollution begins when rainwater moves over the ground surface and reacts with excess nutrients, oil, and loose soil particles (sand, silt, and clay) that eventually enter the watershed through ditches, creeks, and rivers. Homeowners need to make sure to apply fertilizers and pesticides at the proper rate, plant ground cover in erosion prone locations, choose native plant species, use water conservation strategies, properly maintain septic tanks, recycle, and perform routine automobile maintenance to prevent oil leaks.

## Ten Great Habitats for Fish and Wildlife

By: Tyree Harrington

To improve your land for fish and wildlife, think first of food, water, cover and space needs of the wildlife you want to attract throughout the year. Then begin to establish plants, water sources, and other practices that fit those needs. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service offers technical help for landowners in planning for wildlife habitat on privately owned lands, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture offers financial help for most conservation practices that also enhance fish and wildlife habitat.

Here are ten of the top habitats for wildlife:

1. Restored wetland. If you had to choose a single habitat or practice, this is probably the one used by the most species.
2. Windbreak/shelterbelt. Rows of trees and shrubs offer prime shelter and food in the winter.
3. Riparian buffer. Habitat value is enhanced by being next to water, and vegetation along streams improves water quality for fish and wildlife.
4. Diverse grass planting. Blocks of native grasses and forbs intermingled with forage land and crop fields can offer grassland for birds nesting and cold weather cover, and protection from predators.
5. Managed timber. Plant lower densities, thin or burn, or leave open spaces or borders of grasses, and legumes. Leave trees along streams for fish habitat.
6. Habitat connection corridors. Large blocks of grasslands, wetlands or woodlands are most useful when connected by corridors of grasses and trees that protect wildlife on the move.
7. Managed grazing land. Planned rotational grazing can protect streamsides for fish, create diverse habitat for wildlife, open up dense vegetation canopies, and provide nesting habitat and cover.
8. Farm pond. Offers water for wildlife and habitat for fish, waterfowl, frogs, salamanders, turtles and other species. Plant the surrounding area with trees, shrubs and grasses.
9. Edge plantings. "Edge" cover, a strip planted between a crop field and forests, meets several wildlife needs at once.
10. Clean water. Conservation practices that protect upland soils and streamsides also produce cleaner water for wildlife, fish, livestock and people.

For more information, stop at our office at 12238 Ashley Drive in Gulfport, or visit the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute's website at [www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov) or the NRCS home web site at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

## Native Plants for Attracting Backyard Wildlife

By: Patricia R. Drackett

Would you like to know what plants you can use in your landscape to benefit local wildlife? Well, here is a summary of Crosby Arboretum's recent presentation on "Native Plants for Attracting Backyard Wildlife" at MSU's Poplarville Experiment Station Field Day.

Even though it has been three years since Hurricane Katrina, many homeowners who visit the Arboretum are still asking about trees and shrubs that are good choices for replanting their lost vegetation. There is also a considerable interest in plants for attracting wildlife. Not only did many coastal residents lose their homes to the storm, but local wildlife lost valuable food sources and shelter. By learning which trees and shrubs have the highest benefit to wildlife, we will be able to make wise choices when replacing lost habitat, planting a new property, or adding to our existing landscaping.

It's nice to feed the birds, but even nicer (and cheaper) to plant a mix of low-maintenance native species that will provide wildlife with food sources throughout the year. Excellent examples of shrubs with great fruit are native blueberries, wax myrtle, beautyberry, hollies, and viburnum. Trees such as oaks, mayhaw, grancy graybeard, southern magnolia, black gum, southern crabapple, and black cherry also all have a high wildlife value. Provide a mix of plant layers of various heights, as well as a mix of evergreen and deciduous plants. Finally, keep in mind that many terrestrial animals move within vegetative corridors and are often reluctant to cross into open areas for fear of predators. For this reason, consider attaching island beds to a site perimeter bed, to increase the habitat used by such species.

The MSU Extension Service's website ([www.msucare.com](http://www.msucare.com)) contains a wealth of information on how to incorporate Mississippi's native plant species into the home landscape. And, MSU has received high compliments from other state extension services on the usefulness and completeness of this information in particular. Here is how to access the information for selecting and designing with Mississippi native plants for backyard wildlife:

From the main [www.msucare.com](http://www.msucare.com) page, choose "Lawns & Gardens" from the left menu. On the Lawns & Gardens page, click on "Publications Area" in the top menu bar. Then, you may search by topic, i.e. "Backyard wildlife" yields a link to Extension Publication 2402, "Establishing a Backyard Wildlife Habitat". This publication is chock-full of information. Of particular note are lists of specific plants for attracting birds, hummingbirds, and butterflies, and a section on designing a backyard habitat.

A search in the publications area on "native trees" and "native shrubs" will lead to two informative articles on excellent plant choices for Mississippi landscapes. What is very helpful about these two publications is the "at a glance" information that the author provides, revealing the plant's moisture requirements, time of fruiting, and whether it has a low, medium, or high value for wildlife.

Finally, from the main Lawns & Gardens webpage, one can choose "Landscaping" to access a fact sheet area that contains more relevant information, including "Sustainable Landscapes" and "Wildlife in the Garden". Under the sustainable heading, of particular note is "Designing with Native Plants and Naturalistic Landscapes". The author of most of the material described here is Bob Brzuszek, who was curator of the Crosby Arboretum for more than a decade.

Because native plants are adapted to our local climate and soils, they do well in drought conditions, and don't require copious amounts of fertilizer to be happy. And, they tend to have fewer pest and diseases than non-native species, thus reducing the amount of chemical needed to combat these problems. Using fewer chemicals results in a healthier local water supply (and more money in your pocket!)

Native plants are not always available at the usual retail sources. You may be more likely to find examples of native trees than shrubs. Some plants, like the grancy graybeard, however, have a strong regional following and are usually seasonally available. And, keep in mind that our local "mom & pop" garden centers appreciate your support. They are an indispensable resource when you are yearning for a knowledgeable person with solid advice on fitting plants to your particular site. They may also be able to locate hard-to-find plants for you.

The Crosby Arboretum recently held its fall plant sale, and still has some good remaining stock for your shopping pleasure! They hold several large sales throughout the year, including the Arbor Day and the spring plant sale, and an aquatic sale in the summer. The Arboretum also plans to increase production of plants grown from its on-site sources. To keep up with these sale dates, as well as upcoming programs and events, visit their website at [www.crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu](http://www.crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu).

For more information contact Patricia Drackett, Senior Curator at the Crosby Arboretum at 601-799-2311.

### **Bark Lice No Reason to Panic**

*By: Dr. Gary R. Bachman  
Assistant Extension Professor of Horticulture  
Coastal Research & Extension Center*

Many a home owner has panicked this summer after seeing their oak tree's trunk and limbs covered with webbing that resembles panty hose. We get the calls at Coastal REC asking whether their tree is going to die. The good news is that the trees will be OK.

The webbing is caused by a member of the psocid family called bark lice. Bark lice are small soft-bodied insects about 1/8" long that live under the protective webbing. They feed on the algae, lichen, fungi and molds that naturally grow on tree bark. The webbing is almost never found on the tree foliage.

During the summer and early fall the long periods of high humidity along the Gulf coast are conducive for invasions of these insects. It is not uncommon for the webbing to start at the bottom and proceed all the way to the top of the tree.

There are no control recommendations as infestations do not result in damage to the trees and the bark lice will leave on their own accord. The webbing is fragile and will deteriorate over the summer. If you are really bothered by the bark lice, a solution of 2 to 4 tablespoons dish soap per gallon of water and sprayed on the webbing may encourage the insects to leave and find another tree.

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This newsletter was compiled by Dr. Chris Boyd. For more information, visit our office at 1815 Popp's Ferry Road, Biloxi, MS 39532 or telephone (228) 388-4710.