



# Altamira

Frontera Audubon Society • 1101 South Texas Blvd.  
Weslaco, TX 78596

## Time Passes and It's Summer Again...

Warm temperatures seem to stretch from May through November here in the Valley, and there is no escaping the fact that to enjoy nature you're going to battle the heat, the bugs and the humidity. The rewards are astounding, however, and Frontera's Thicket holds some warm weather treasures. When signing in at the Visitors' Center, pick up some bug spray, cold water and a new trail guide before you take off. This Eastern Amberwing was photographed by Dan Jones a few days ago, and is the model for a piece of jewelry being created by a local artist.



### SUMMER HOURS:

**Wednesday thru Saturday: 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. Sunday: Noon until 4 p.m.**

**Closed Monday and Tuesday except by special arrangement (956) 968-3275**

***\*A contributions box and board for posts has been installed on the deck. If Visitors' Center is unattended, please leave messages and payment there.***

***Thank you,  
The Frontera Staff***

## A Quick Look Back...And Then Move On

*By Cindy Willson, Executive Director*

It is a pleasure for me to look back on the past year! I became ED at Frontera on Oct. 1st of 2009, about 30 seconds before we were deluged by the first big group of Winter Texans and northern state birders. Think Fast!! There's nothing in the feeders! The gate's still locked; where's the key? The cash register doesn't work, and the van from NABA just pulled up! Do we have a powerpoint on local butterflies? Do we have any volunteers? And who has a real good reason why that old house hasn't been restored? Are those fruit trees really heirlooms from 1927? Come on?

I soon found that these logistical problems were just the tip of the Frontera iceberg. Frontera faces the dilemmas that all good nature centers go through in finding their purpose, their audience, and their plan.

Now, after completing fiscal year 2009-2010, we look back at the past few months, the open houses, the fundraisers, the staff changes, the newspaper articles, and the membership growth. Operations at Frontera Audubon are much better organized with the addition of Chris Warren in the Visitors' Center, our membership has grown by 85% and our membership information is more readily accessible. The community is being kept up to date (...**Moving On** continued on page 2)

## Summer, 2010.

### Events at Frontera:

- **Sat. July 24. 8a.m.-noon.** Frontera's Tag Sale of Unique Items. Donated items of intrigue will be offered in the Frontera Parking Area with refreshments and baked goods in the Visitors' Center.
- **Friday Mornings, 10 a.m.** Nature walks with Master Naturalist John Thaxter.
- **Thurs. July 15. 6:30 p.m.** Frontera Board meeting. Visitors' Center. 1101 S. Texas Blvd.
- **Thurs. Sept. 16. 6:30 p.m.** Frontera Board meeting. Visitors' Center. 1101 S. Texas Blvd., Weslaco, Texas.

## **Moving On ...** (continued from page 1)

with regular coverage in our local press, and a new, more comprehensive website and blog site are available to members and non-members. This year the \$10,000 Wetlands Grant made available to us through the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory and Frontera's participation in the Great Birding Classic has been completed utilizing a crew of industrious, hardworking young men who have spent more than 1,000 man hours removing invasive plants, shoring up trails, and cleaning the marsh and our storm drainage canal.

During 2010-2011 we will continue to build community support through outreach that interprets our unique natural and built environment with programs on wildlife, water management, and architectural preservation. Our fundraising efforts will include a summer tag sale, a fundraising dinner and auction with the help of Mr. and Mrs. Bud Payne, a performance event, birdathon, quarterly brisket bbqs, and continued cooperation with local businesses in our Frontera Partners Program.

Our plans are ambitious, our membership is growing, and we are faced with the cold, hard reality that we must work hard to sustain Frontera Audubon.

And so it truly is a pleasure to look back on the past year... because we have summer to make our plans for the arrival of our Winter Visitors, our safflower seed is being donated, the gate's unlocked (and we have a spare key), our volunteers are working on a Volunteer Program, a menu selection of powerpoint presentations is in the works, the Skaggs House is getting a new front door, and if you would like to know the "scoop" on those fruit trees, just turn to page 4.

*And thank you for supporting Frontera Audubon!*

## **Board Members ... 2010-2011**

**Jim Chapman:** President. Jim has worked as a physician's assistant at Su Clinica Familiar for more than 20 years. He has shown similar devotion to Frontera Audubon, having assisted in the original donation of the Skaggs House and accompanying grounds, donating 1 1/2 acres of his own land, and helping to establish the City ordinance to protect all of it.

**Maurie Haas:** Vice President. She's back. She dedicated 22 years of service to Frontera Audubon, took a short break, and now has been coaxed to come back and help revive a spirit of volunteerism and fundraising. Maurie supports the Frontera membership's interest in seeing Frontera become a spot of community interest, as well as enhancing it as the destination it has become. She lives for the mission of conservation of the land.

**MeLynda Nuss:** Treasurer. As an author and English professor at UTPA, Melynda is interested in the growth of Frontera as a cultural asset to the community. She will be working to further programming that interprets the arts, nature, and history. MeLynda oversees the financial sustainability at Frontera and she will be monitoring our progress to build a funding base. And MeLynda loves to garden!

**Irene Szedlmayer:** Secretary. Irene is beginning her sixth year of service on Frontera's Board helping us attend to issues that try the patience and soul of many: reviewing and updating bylaws, contracts, bank signatory notes, and internal audits. As a land use planner with a legal background, Irene is irreplaceable in this role.

**John McClung:** He's a lobbyist, working on behalf of the environment and the citrus industry. John understands the value of Frontera as a valued commodity in the world of ecotourism. He has taken on the fundraising task of seeking public funding for Frontera.

**Rod Summy:** As a Frontera Board Member, Rod is dedicated to addressing important environmental issues and preserving our existing natural areas. As a "high tech biologist," Rod is working on a remote sensing project that involves the identification of invasive plant species via infrared photography.

**Dan Jones:** Dan is a birder, tried and true, and a great resource for Frontera. Dan has recently updated Frontera's Birds of the Thicket, a listing of 219 species of birds with abundance codes, and he will be heading up next Spring's Birdathon 2011.

*Seven individuals with seven distinctly different personalities working together to create and sustain a unique urban jewel. This is a working board ... a fundraising board. Two positions are empty, awaiting the right person. Contact Cindy if you are interested at (956) 968-3275.*



## **Sabal Texana and the Frontera Thicket**

When you take the time and pleasure to walk through the Thicket, one of the more noticeable trees you encounter is our only native palm, *Sabal texana*. They weren't here originally. Sabals occurred mainly near the Rio Grande, further east, giving rise to the first Spanish name for the river, Rio De Las Palmas. An 1854 expedition to explore the U.S.-Mexico border included a botanist who described dense palm forests extending about 80 miles up-river, to present-day Santa Maria, near the Cameron-

Hidalgo County line. All those forests were subsequently cleared, except for a few tiny remnants in the Southmost area, east of Brownsville. The Rabb farm had the largest remnant of Sabal palm forest, about 32 acres which they used as a nursery. This was sold to National Audubon Society in 1971 and is today the wonderful Sabal Palm Sanctuary, which, sadly, is still closed. There are smaller bits of palm forest in the Texas Nature Conservancy's 1,034 acre Lennox Foundation Southmost Preserve downstream from the Sanctuary. 85% of the Preserve is now blocked off by the border wall, this despite protests and a legal challenge. Unlike National Audubon, the Preserve has decided to keep functioning, and I am grateful for that. Immediately upstream from the Sabal Palm Sanctuary there are no old growth remnants, but for the past 20 years the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has been revegetating old farm fields back into native forest, including Sabal palms.

Frontera has participated in the conservation community's efforts to restore *Sabal texana*. In the early 1990's a group of volunteers including Michael Delesantro, students, and Weslaco's Fire Marshall planted 15 Sabal seedlings (about half survived) as well as many Texas Ebony seedlings. A few years later Bill MacWhorter donated a dozen larger Sabals. You see these today where the trail loop begins, just before it drops down toward the feeding station. The closest thing we have to a Sabal palm forest is the palm grove between the cemetery and the boardwalk (not counting the clump of taller Washingtonian palms). These palms were purchased and planted thanks to a generous donation made by Sylvia and Myles Aaronson. The City of Weslaco donated the property. And the City more recently helped rescue and transplant two large Sabals from a yard on Sixth Street, one of which is the State Champion *Sabal texana*. And miracles of miracles (large Sabals are notoriously hard to transplant), they are thriving in their new home in front of the Skaggs House.

To all these people, and to others who helped so much along the way, including Richard Lehman, Joe Harren, Selena and Ken King, we owe a debt of gratitude. There is no end to the good they have done. You can see it every day in Frontera's Thicket.

**Jim Chapman, President**

**July 9, 2010**

## Frontera's Citrus Orchard and Butterfly Gardens the Site of Important Citrus Psyllid Research

Frontera's Citrus Orchard and Butterfly Gardens is neither "heirloom" nor historic, but it is special, nonetheless. The oldest of the citrus is a tangerine tree found at the southwest corner of the Skaggs House, and it is estimated to have been planted in the late 1950's. Others show signs of having survived freezes in 1983 and 1989; a couple are white grapefruit, most are Ruby Red. All of them are useful in providing habitat for the small mammals, bird, butterflies, other bugs and reptiles that live in that portion of the property. USDA entomologist and Frontera member Joe Patt is utilizing the orchard to compile data on a tiny insect, the Asian citrus psyllid, that is a precursor to a devastating disease of citrus that has wiped out citrus trees in Florida, both in commercial groves and in the backyards of many homeowners.

Dr. Robert S. Pfannenstiel is a Research Entomologist with the United States Dept. of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service. He received his MS in Entomology from Texas A&M University and his Ph.D. from the University of Kentucky. He has been studying natural enemies of crop pests with the goal of improving the level of biological control for 26 years. Currently his program is studying predator complexes in south Texas crops with the goal of improving control of the Asian Citrus psyllid in citrus and various pests in soybean and cotton. Of particular interest are the previously unstudied nocturnally active predators. Dr. Bob Pfannenstiel has prepared the following article to educate us a bit about the spreading occurrence of "citrus greening" and its implications for the Rio Grande Valley's citrus trees.

*A tiny insect, the Asian citrus psyllid (pronounced: sil-id), unknown in Texas until 2001, threatens the citrus industry not only in the Rio Grande Valley but throughout the world. The psyllid carries a bacterial disease, called 'citrus greening' or 'huang long bing' ('dragon's tail' in Chinese), that kills citrus trees of all kinds. Psyllids transmit the disease as they feed on a tree's sap. Citrus greening is still not present in Texas but has caused major damage to the Florida citrus industry over the past decade. The psyllid was detected in California in 2009 but, as in Texas, citrus greening is not yet present. The disease is spreading northward from southern Mexico and Belize.*

*Trees infested with citrus greening become stunted and produce misshapen and bitter fruit. Because diseased trees can't be detected until one- to two years after they've become infected, citrus greening can spread rapidly through citrus groves. There is no treatment and infected trees are usually destroyed to reduce the amount of bacterial inoculum present in the groves. When citrus greening does make its way to Texas, management plans centered on spraying insecticides will be implemented to protect commercial groves. However, slowing the spread of the disease in south Texas will be difficult because of the large number of citrus trees that can't be sprayed in backyards, parks, and other environmentally sensitive areas. Without some control of the psyllid in these situations, it will be difficult to prevent the disease from spreading throughout the commercial citrus groves in the Rio Grande Valley. There are many insects and spiders that prey or parasitize the Asian citrus psyllid, so natural biological control agents may be the most important means of controlling them in backyards and similar situations.*

*My technician, Frank De La Fuente, and I are conducting studies in backyard citrus at several locations in the mid-Valley, including the old citrus orchard at Frontera Audubon. We are tracking the psyllids' population levels to learn how rainfall and other environmental factors affect its numbers. We are also determining which predaceous insects and spiders in the Valley show the best potential as biological control agents. We'll use this information to develop techniques to reduce psyllid populations in backyards without insecticides. These techniques will include applying sugar and yeast sprays to feed the predators, scent attractants to increase their numbers in backyard trees, applying repellent scents to discourage psyllids from visiting trees, and using fungal pathogens specific to reduce psyllid populations. This combination of control tactics will provide an environmentally safe way to reduce Asian citrus psyllid populations in backyard citrus.*

**TREASURER’S REPORT ON FY 2009-2010**

*Respectfully submitted by MeLynda Nuss, Treasurer*

Frontera is doing fairly well despite tough financial times. As we expected, our bingo income is down, though not quite as much as was feared -14.42% after taking into account increased bingo expenses. The good news is that our bingo income has returned to last year’s levels for April and May of 2010, and we expect bingo to hold fairly steady in the short term. But, the Board realizes that bingo will probably never be able to support Frontera at the level necessary to move ahead optimistically. Frontera is stepping up its fundraising. Our Annual Appeal, our three bbqs, birdathon, and other small fundraisers brought in \$16,450; after expenses, those fundraisers netted \$12,305 for Frontera. That is a whopping 79% increase over last year’s fundraising of \$6,863.50. We have also been working on our wetlands grant, so we have been able to spend more money on the wetlands, 45% more, than last year.

On the expense side, we have been saving where we can and spending where we have to. Staffing costs, insurance, and payroll costs are all down slightly. We even cut our electric bill by 12%. We also were able to cut our basic Thicket costs and labor expenses so that even with additional materials for landscaping, Thicket costs were down. But we did not spare expenses for necessities. We increased spending 69% on our conservation programs, and, of course, with additional fundraising activities, we had extra costs for postage, advertising, and improvements to the Visitors’ Center and Skaggs House. We also had an unexpected termite infestation that we had to take care of, and we updated a portion of our antiquated computer system so that we could reach new audiences with out website and our blog. These expenses should pay dividends well into the future and should not have to be repeated anytime soon.

Frontera is continuing to put its financial house in order. Chris Warren, our new Admin. Assist., has taken QuickBooks classes, and we are working on updating our cash management procedures and producing clearer and more understandable financial statements. Even so, Frontera still ends this fiscal year in the red by \$33,042, 15% more than last year’s loss of \$28,722. We are working hard to step up our fundraising efforts so that we can continue doing the good work that we do at Frontera.

THE PASSING OF A FRIEND. **William ‘Dub’ Lauder** passed away on July 2 after a brief illness. Though always in the background, Dub was a long-time friend and supporter of Frontera and the Valley Nature Center. Dub was an accountant and banker in Mercedes, while his wife Jean was Treasurer and then President of Frontera in the mid-1980’s before devoting her time and energy to Valley Nature Center for nearly 20 years. Dub always supported Jean and her work, and befriended many in the conservation community. Dub’s irrepressible smile, his kindness and his generosity were well-known. He leaves behind his wife Jean, daughters Julie and Sarah, and several grandchildren.

Frontera Audubon will be planting a Texas Mountain Laurel tree in the landscape of the historic Skaggs House in memory of Dub Lauder. Those wishing to contribute to the memorial may contact Frontera.

Valley Nature Center has established a memorial, and those wishing to give may contact VNC at (956) 969-2475.

**MEMBERSHIP:** Membership at Frontera Audubon continues to grow. Currently membership is at 257 dedicated supportive members. Please consider raising your membership level, as that small increase on your part will make a huge difference to Frontera.

**Summer Renewals**

**New Memberships**

**Buff-bellied Hummingbird:**

David & Selina Carrales  
Ken King

**Black-bellied Whistling Duck:**

Mariza Barbosa

**Family:**

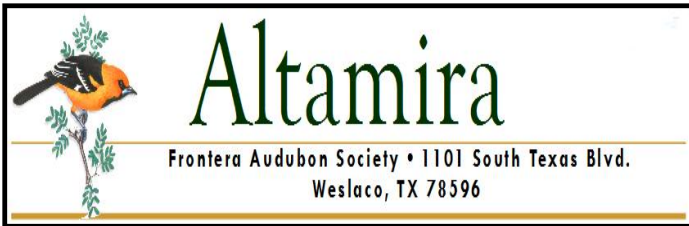
Larry & Mary Vaughn  
Huck Hutchens  
Ronna Laager

**Individual:**

Al Richardson  
Pauline Bulen

**Family:**

Elodia Rodriguez  
Jim Forward  
Bruce Wilson  
Debbie Villalon  
Ben Villalon  
Ron and Belda Hill  
Ken Garver & Karen Macking



**Open Wednesday- Saturday**

**8a.m.—4p.m.**

**Sunday**

**12noon—4p.m.**

**Closed Monday and Tuesday**

## Frontera's Wish List:

Please help... you really are making a difference in every little thing you do!

- Unique, lightly used items for Tag Sale. No clothing, please. Items that are simply too fabulous for a tag sale will be retained for auction at Fall fundraiser.
- Lap top computer.
- Office supplies: copy paper, Sharpie pens, white letter sized envelopes, paper towels.
- Citrus, bananas, brown sugar, white sugar, cheap beer.
- Your time ... the most precious and hardest to come by.

Keep current by accessing Frontera's blog at [fronteraaudubon.wordpress.com](http://fronteraaudubon.wordpress.com) or the Frontera website ([fronteraaudubon.org](http://fronteraaudubon.org)). Your comments and suggestions are always welcome!

*Thank you to **CopyZone, Inc.** for helping with our printing needs this quarter.*

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