

Nature Notes

2nd Quarter 2025

Volume 65 No. 2



Welcoming New Board Members of Outdoor Nature Club Board Position Election Results from 2025 Election

On May 24, 2025, Outdoor Nature Club members present at the General Meeting at Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary voted to elect the following members of the board of directors:

Mike Zuchowski, President

Jeri Garrett, Membership Vice President

Roberto Argentina, Secretary-Treasurer

Shaila Palamand, Executive Director of Sanctuaries

Bios of these board members can be found on Pages 2-3.

ONC members may contact the board members by email via info@outdoornatureclub.org. If your email is directed to a specific board member, please note the board member's name in the subject line.

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Outdoor Nature Club wishes to express gratitude to the outgoing board members for their many years of hard work and dedication. Appreciation is expressed for:

Nina Rach, President 2014 - 2025

Michael Honel, Membership Vice President 2019 - 2025

Charles Peterson, Executive Director of Sanctuaries 2017-2025

Tira Overstreet, Ornithology Group Representative 2018 - 2025

President

Mike (Z) Zuchowski

An ONC member since 2018, Mike is also a neighbor of Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS). He has previous experience leading a board of directors, having served as vice president and president of a 493-home community. Mike is retired and spends much of his time doing trail and tractor maintenance, clearing brush, mowing, removing fallen trees, assisting youth groups visiting LTNS, managing the LTNS Facebook page, recruiting new ONC members and giving new members LTNS orientations.

Membership Vice President

Jeri Garrett

Jeri and her husband George, both longtime residents of the Coldspring area, became Supporting Members of ONC in 2025 and have enjoyed camping in Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS). Jeri volunteers at the San Jacinto County animal shelter, where she advertises adoptable pets on the shelter's social media feeds and performs in-person community outreach at events.

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Secretary-Treasurer

Roberto Argentina

An ONC member since 2018, Roberto is a high school teacher in Houston. Roberto is also a volunteer group leader with The Woods Project (TWP) and he spends several weekends a year with TWP youth groups visiting Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS). Roberto also visits LTNS on his own time to help clear trails on a volunteer basis.

Executive Director of Sanctuaries

Shaila Palamand

A new 2025 ONC member, Shaila (pronounced “shy-la”) is a Texas Master Naturalist affiliated with the Piney Woods Lakes Chapter and serves as their Communications Director. She is also an avid birder and amateur photographer. Shaila is a former board member of Audubon Dallas, where she helped to maintain and enhance Cedar Ridge Preserve. Shaila has a special passion for preserving, improving and creating wildlife and native plant habitat.

OUR CHARTER

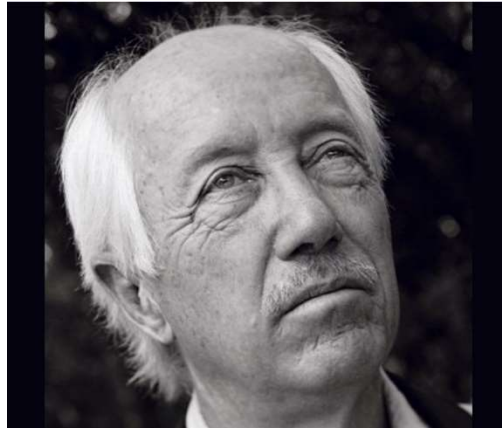
The purpose and objective of this organization shall be to cooperate in the enjoyment and study of nature, to further the conservation of natural resources and foster interest in them, and to work toward the establishment and maintenance of nature sanctuaries and natural preserves.

[ARTICLE II - ONC CONSTITUTION]

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Remembering Victor Emanuel

1940 - 2025

Outdoor Nature Club was saddened to learn of the recent passing of Victor Emanuel. Victor was an internationally famous birder, environmental advocate, ecotourism leader and founder of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). VENT was founded in 1976. Victor pioneered the ecotourism concept.

Victor Emanuel played a huge role in the Houston area nature and environmental arena.

DID YOU KNOW ?

Victor got his start and developed his love of nature as a junior member of Outdoor Nature Club, where he studied under the tutelage of Joe Heiser and Armand Yramategui.

Victor was interviewed several times over the years by Texas Legacy Project, including interviews by David Todd, an Outdoor Nature Club Life Member and descendent of Joseph Cullinan.

An excerpt from a 2022 interview in which Victor mentions Outdoor Nature Club and Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary can be found beginning on Page 6.

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OUTDOOR NATURE CLUB MEMORIES
PHOTOS FROM THE PAST



The caption on the back of this photo of Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary reads:

*A leafy lane in the proposed sanctuary
1928*

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Excerpt of interview with Victor Emanuel by Texas Legacy Project, June 14, 2022

Interviewer Lee Smith (Texas Legacy Project): So how did you start birdwatching at such an early age? What was it, eight?

Victor Emanuel: Really probably even earlier. My mother threw out seeds in the backyard under the fig tree in the backyard and a male cardinal came and I saw it. I'd never seen such a beautiful creature.

Then I was walking to school right after that and right next to me in a little bush was this black and white little bird. It was a chickadee. Almost close enough that I could touch it. And that just ... birds became a big part of my life.

But really, the key thing was that, again, there are these forks in the road. I was in the Cub Scouts and one of my colleagues in the Cub Scouts - another young man - said, "Victor, you need to join the Outdoor Nature Club and there'll be more of what you're interested in."

It was in the library downtown, the old library. My parents took me. I'll never forget going in the room and there were like 50 people, all of them very old - for me. I was like eight, nine. I was like nine.

And there I met my two wonderful mentors. And I love the word mentor because it comes from Ulysses and from Homer.

When Ulysses went to Troy, he left his son Telemachus in the care of a man named Mentor because he was gone for, you know, like 20 years. Later on in Greek life - ancient Greece - when you saw someone helping a young person, you said, "You're like Mentor." You are a mentor. Like you're another Mentor.

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Well, anyway, I met Armand Yramategui and Joe Heiser.

Joe Heiser had been the head of the club. He was a great conservationist. He was one of those people that saw the need to do things to help save wild things and birds and animals and trees.

And he saw that the Big Thicket was being radically changed by tree farms. Instead of a variety of trees, they were all pine trees. They would grow fast and get cut down and they'd plant more pine trees.

He (Joe) worked for Texaco as an accountant. He was high up in Texaco. And he had saved his money. He lived with his siblings. He didn't get married. His father had been head of the Houston Parks Board, I think, for years, so he had a background in conservation of parks.

Joe had the idea that we needed to buy some land north of Houston in East Texas – like 500 or 1000 acres – and reseed it with the trees that had been cut down, recreate the little – they called it the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary that Joe created. And I would go (to Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary) with him on weekends to help plant trees and scatter seeds and bring back the Big Thicket in that patch of land.

So that was my mentor. That was what I was exposed to right away.

And he knew every bird song. My favorite story about Joe: He would be in his cabin or a tent or whatever he had sleeping by himself. I would be camping with a friend. And he'd be sound asleep. He wouldn't be waking up early and birds would be singing. All of a sudden, he'd hear a bird that he hadn't heard before – an unusual bird – and he'd wake up right away. So his mind was processing bird sounds even while he was asleep. He was phenomenal at identifying that's this bird, that's this bird... birds and plants and everything.

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Joe and Armand. His (Armand's) is parents were from Mexico. His father was from southern Mexico, central Mexico, was Basque, and his mother was from Monterey. They had met in Houston, got married and had a couple of kids. Armand was an all-around naturalist, too.

I was so fortunate that my mentors were people that were all-around naturalists. They weren't just interested in birds and they weren't - as we have many people now - "Well, let's find this bird because it would be new for me. I've never seen it."

They liked everything. It didn't matter if you'd seen it before. Just look at it and enjoy it. And they did.

There were some very special birds. There's a bird called the Worm-eating Warbler - kind of an odd name - that is only found in a few parts of East Texas. They found it on the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary and I got to see it. So that was very special, seeing a very unusual warbler there.

They were these wonderful mentors and they were great conservationists.

They started nature conservancy before Texas Nature Conservancy was created because they saw what was happening and they looked for plots of land that were threatened.

One I remember particularly. It's coming back to me. It was a bog, a wetland area north of Koontz, that had pitcher plants, sundew. And it was threatened. It was going to be all cut down and changed.

So they raised the money. Thanks to his connections with Texaco, he knew the three daughters of Joe Cullinan, who had started Texaco, and they - being the daughters of Joe Cullinan - were able to make large contributions in there with their money.

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The three daughters were... I have to remember their names. I knew them. There was Nina Cullinan and there was Margaret Wray. She was a Cullinan but her married name was Margaret Wray. And Mary Cravens. They had the nickname, "the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria."

They were the first people I knew about that had the considerable means that did a lot for conservation and that was thanks to Joe Heiser and Texaco. They saved significant parts of land before Nature Conservancy was even created or thought of.

He was my mentor, Joe.

We bought the land north of Houston, 100, 500 acres at \$30 an acre. He paid for it with his money from Texaco and he sold it to the Outdoor Nature Club at the price he had paid for it. They could pay it out over years with no interest. Just get a little bit of money back for what he had put in. Extraordinary man.

And so was Armand. Armand was a great, great conservationist and was particularly interested in astronomy, and sadly was killed when his car broke down and people stopped to help him and robbed him and killed him on the Southwest Parkway. He was going out to see a comet or something. That was one of the worst things in my life when my mentor, Armand, got killed. There was actually a story in the editorial page about him, about Armand.

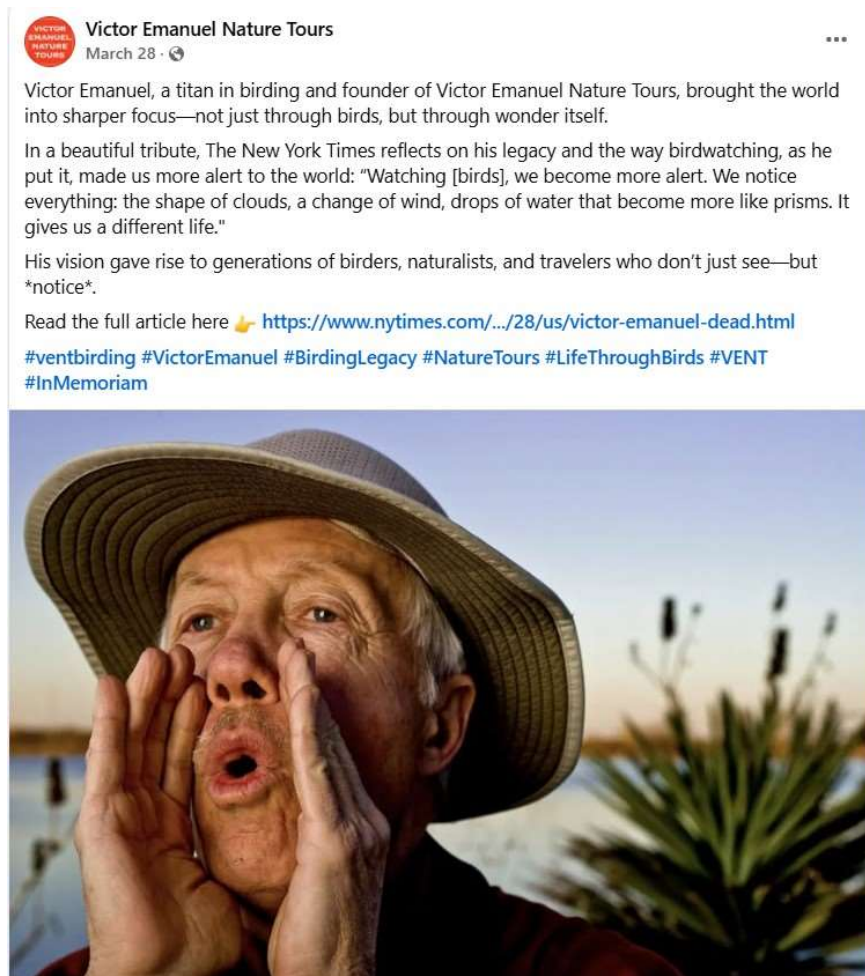
Armand also, like Joe, appreciated everything. He had this incredible enthusiasm, which I think I already had, but he certainly augmented it because he wouldn't say "There's a bird called the vermillion flycatcher. It's a beautiful red flycatcher." He wouldn't say, "Look over there, there's a vermillion flycatcher." He says, "Look, there is a vermillion flycatch!"

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It's interesting because I was told that the name, Yramategui, is what you say in the Basque country when you get to the top of a mountain. Instead of saying, "Wonderful", you say "Yramategui!" That was his last name and that's the way he was. And he was my mentor.

Both he and Joe were my mentors. I was so fortunate.

At the Outdoor Nature Club, I met a wonderful woman from Minneapolis who was interested in botany. These older people were very nice at helping a young person like me, all of the ones in the club. I was in that club for years, probably until I went away to college.



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Have you renewed your membership for 2025?

OUTDOOR NATURE CLUB
New/Renewal Membership Form
(www.outdoornatureclub.org)

NOTE: Dues are paid January 1 of each calendar year.

CATEGORY 1 – ONC Parent Organization (please circle one)

\$8 Individual
\$15 Family
\$40 Supporting
\$250 Life Member

SUB TOTAL Category 1

\$

CATEGORY 2 – OG Ornithology Study Group (optional - please circle one)

\$12 Individual OG
\$15 Family OG

SUB TOTAL Category 2

\$

CATEGORY 3 — DONATIONS (please specify)

ONC General Fund

\$

ORNITHOLOGY (OG)

\$

LTNS (Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary)

\$

SUB TOTAL Category 3

\$

TOTAL ENCLOSED (Add Categories 1+2+3)

Payable to: OUTDOOR NATURE CLUB

\$

NEW MEMBERS: How did you hear about us? ☐ At an OG meeting ☐ From a friend
☐ Found on Internet ☐ Saw poster at Bayland Community Center ☐ Wish to attend OG field trip
☐ Other (please specify): _____

ACCESS TO LITTLE THICKET NATURE SACTUARY

Sanctuary rules state that before new members can gain access to LTNS, they must come to the sanctuary during a regularly scheduled visitors event; dates are posted on our website. At that time, they will be given a copy of the sanctuary rules and a trail map and can become oriented to the trail system.

Thank you!

We appreciate your support and hope to see you soon at one of our meetings.

Name(s)

Phone:

Address:

City/ST/Zip:

Email:

Checks payable to and mail to:
OUTDOOR NATURE CLUB, PO Box 1014, Bellaire TX 77402-1014