

Summary: Joe Liggio, Orchidaceae (Orchids)

In 1976 Professor Claude McLeod first introduced Joe Liggio to the Big Thicket. Shortly thereafter he began to make frequent trips to study and photograph the many interesting wild flowers of the Big Thicket and East Texas. He took a special interest in orchids and other rare plants. Since that time, Liggio explored all of the units of the Big Thicket National Preserve in search of orchids. In the February 1989 Texas Highways Magazine, Liggio's photographs were featured in Howard Peacock's Orchids of the Big Thicket. Encouraged by naturalist author and professional nature photographer, John Tveten, Joe began researching, writing and photographing Texas orchid species for a book with his wife, Ann, who served as co-author. In 1999, Wild Orchids of Texas was published by University of Texas Press.

Joe Liggio, as a BTA Director, was very interested in the Thicket of Diversity (ToD) from its very beginning in 2006. He regularly conducted hikes including field trips for Kountze ISD students and at the Watson Preserve. He offered a science café on orchids at the Logon Café. Liggio conducted book signings for many years at BTA Day. Although no longer active as a Director, he continues to guide hikes. Liggio's focus has been interpretation.

Liggio shared historical Texas data that Mona Halvorsen scanned into a file. The most accurate orchid data with the required data points were excerpted from Larry Brown's Vascular Plant list. Liggio successfully partnered with Brown and others.

In 2026, ToD intern Natalia Doiron, and ToD Chair, Mary C. Johnston, coordinated an oral history video documenting Liggio's lifelong interest in orchid research. Additionally, he shared information on the Texas Oklahoma Herbarium Database where verified listings can be located by geographical areas. Doiron is currently identifying the current vouchered orchid species for the Texas counties of Hardin, Jefferson, Orange, Liberty, Polk, Jasper and Tyler and will include this information in an update of the ToD's Taxa Tally.

Liggio was not ToD funded. However the ToD recognizes him as "The Orchid Man" as Joe provided valuable interpretive services for the public and beautiful photographs on Big Thicket orchids.

Submitted by Mary C. Johnston, March 20, 2026