



# RIPPLES

VOL 2 No 3

MAY/JUNE 2013

### UPCOMING EVENTS

Bats every Friday evening  
NPSOT 5/9

Check the website for the many opportunities coming up---way too numerous to even think about posting here!

### NOW YOU KNOW

Butterflies drink, not eat.

The grey fox is the only tree climber in the canine family.

Ravens walk on the ground but crows hop

### INDIAN TRAIL MARKER TREES

PAM GOOLSBY

Native American Peoples had a unique way of marking their trails, also called Indian Trail Trees, Thong Trees or Saddle Trees. (Cowboys often rested their saddle on it.) Indians would select a sapling and bend it, often at a 90 degree angle, pinning it securely to the ground. As the tree grew it would eventually curve again heading for the sky. The arm of the tree not only would mark the trail but also point to a campsite, water supply, low water crossing, food, safety, cave/shelter etc. As the sapling grew, the tree was often pruned to make the sign tree more visible to travelers and to serve as a road sign and map of centuries past.



Berry Springs marker tree



Crescent shaped marker tree

The non-profit Mountain Stewards of Jasper, Ga., started documenting trail trees in 2007 and has a database of 1850 trees in 39 states. Varying tribes used different approaches. The Cherokee bent the sapling low on the trunk, then a sharp upward bend, while the Comanche of North Texas made a half-moon or crescent shape. One, possibly two trees have been identified in Berry Springs Park, and one of our members thinks she has one in her Liberty Hill yard.

## CATTAILS

The familiar brown blossom of the cattail is also known as a candlewick, punk, ducktail, marsh beetle or maybe even a hot dog on a stick. The highly nutritious, tasty plant is easy to harvest and was a major staple for the American Indian diet. There was no need to cultivate it as it was in such great supply. Cattails mostly grow in slow moving or stagnant water which may be polluted. They filter toxins from water and murky streams. Along with reeds and rushes they help stabilize river banks and stop erosion.

Peeled to the white tender center, the early spring shoots, *Cossack's asparagus*, is tasty, mild, sweet and described as tasting a lot like a cucumber. Add to salads for flavor and texture. It retains its crunchiness when added to soup towards the end of cooking. Yummy in stir fry dishes. The root provides beta carotene, niacin, riboflavin, thiamin, vitamin C, and potassium



Young flower heads can be boiled and eaten like corn on the cob. Just before the summer solstice when the male flower opens it produces a fair amount of golden pollen. It is found in the spike on top of the brown velvety female part of the flower. One can eat the pollen raw, sprinkle on yogurt, oatmeal, shakes or salads. The pollen was also used as a hair conditioner. Once the pollen is gone the brown flower heads make good punks that support a slow burning flame and smoke that keeps mosquitoes at bay. The fluffy white seeds were used to stuff blankets, pillows and toys. The Indians added them to moccasins and around cradles for added warmth. Added to flour they provide extra protein and vitamins. The fluff also makes a great fire starter. The tight heads are often dry inside, so even after a heavy rain it makes a good survival tinder. The fluff was also used to treat scalds, burns, and diaper rash. Dried flower heads dipped in animal fat made a good torch.

Jelly, from between the young leaves, treated wounds, sores, boils, carbuncles, and external inflammations to relieve pain. The sticky stuff was also used as an antiseptic, numbing agent and coagulant.

The root rhizomes contain ten times the amount of starch as an equal weight potato and provides a calorie-rich starch. Besides cooking, root flour was also used as a poultice for stings and infections. The mashed root made toothpaste. Added to a drink it treated stomach ailments. Washing mucky rhizomes is a tedious job before one can start the peeling process to make the starch or flour. Rhizomes eaten raw can cause vomiting.

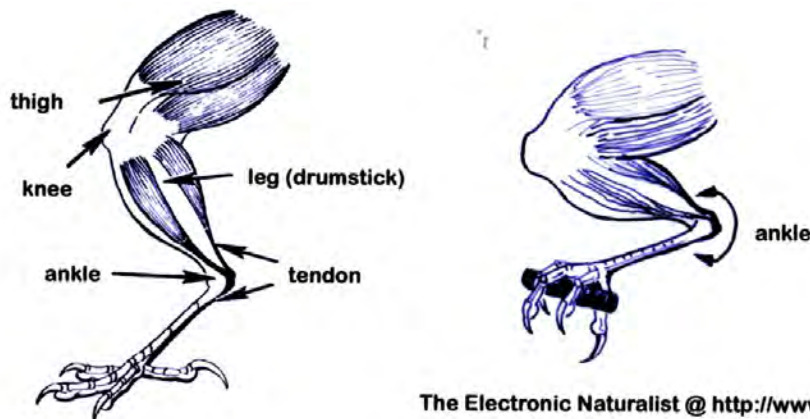
The only part of the plant that is not edible is the leaves. Boiled the leaves made an external skin wash. Dried leaves were used for thatching, weaving baskets & mats, rope and for the making of dolls. Dry stalks were used for hand drills and arrow shafts.

## HEARD FROM

- A 3-year old waking on his first camping trip, "Daddy are we sleeping in a bird house?"
- A botanist that when exotic plants invade an area the number and diversity of caterpillars decline posing a threat to birds that depend on them.
- A new study led by a Canadian toxicologist identifies acutely toxic pesticides as the most likely leading cause of the widespread decline in grassland bird numbers in the United States. From Travis Audubon Newsletter

Certain questions have remained with me throughout adult life, such as: "If we are right-handed and right-eyed, are we also right kidneyed?"

Another: how do birds remain on a perch as they sleep? The diagrams below demonstrate the action of grasping a branch and how a bird stays on a branch while asleep. The Achilles tendon, attached to the leg muscles, stretches around the back of the ankle, continuing on the 'palm' side of the bird's toes. As the bird bends at the ankle, its grip tightens on the branch. "When a bird sleeps, its ankle is bent to its maximum and the toes grip the perch with surprising strength." (1)



Birds can sleep and the leg will stay anchored to the branch. When the bird lifts from the perch position, the Achilles tendons relax the foot's grasp on the branch. [A bat's weight also pulls on the tendon that locks the foot on its perch. (2)

I now know how a bird can sleep on a perch. But I'm left wondering how a wading bird can sleep while standing on one leg.....

(1)The Electronic Naturalist at <http://www.enaturalist.org> EN c2003 John Wiessinger

(2)Ehrlich, Paul R., David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye. The Birder's Handbook, a Field Guide to the Natural History of North American birds. Simon & Schuster, Inc. New York, 1988

## CHAPTER HAPPENINGS

- ❖ During Archeology Days in late March, 17 members participated manning booths and teaching children on a variety of topics.
- ❖ Jim, Pam and Cindy are conducting weekly bird surveys at Berry Springs Park.
- ❖ A quarterly wildflower survey was conducted at the same park on March 23.
- ❖ Betty, Pat and Bonnie manned a booth in Taylor for Earth Day on March 23.
- ❖ April 6 was a big fishing day for youth at Southwest Williamson County Park in Leander.
- ❖ The Balcones Songbird Nature Festival is returning! With a variety of events throughout the weekend of April 26th through 29th, there's something for everyone.
- ❖ Tuesday morning work parties have made progress at Our Lady of the Rosary.
- ❖ JMN class had a wildflower field trip on 4/20.
- ❖ New MN class has had good attendance and many have volunteered on various projects.
- ❖ The nature series for the senior group at the Rec Cen ends with the May meeting.

## WHO'S WHO----MEMBER PROFILES



PAM GOOLSBY

Pam, a recently retired speech pathologist, has been a MN since 2011 and just finished the Master Gardener class. Although like many of us, she is interested in everything with a main emphasis on birds and children. She is involved with the youth education group and with the new MN class. She is often out early in the day birding and is doing a weekly bird survey each week at Berry Springs. She lives busy involved days.



STERLIN BARTON

A few months before retiring, after a long career as a pharmacist, Sterlin completed his training as a member of the first class of GWMN. He has been active from the get go and is always a willing worker to do whatever needs to be done. He is passionate about genealogy, loves working with kiddos and has been very active with the angler program. He is always there for new class members and keeps them well informed of AT and VT opportunities.

## NATURE ENCOUNTERS-----HERE AND THERE

Pam notes some cool bird sightings recently at Berry Springs: Red Headed Woodpecker, Vermillion Flycatchers (both M & F), and a Cinnamon Teal!

Sterlin has had some success with his bluebird houses in spite of persistent sparrows.

New students Lori and Barbara saw and watched a large group of Roseate Spoonbills when visiting Port Aransas. They also were lucky enough to observe a family of whooping cranes.

Judith found a dead bird in a cedar tree after the hail storm when hubby was trimming the damaged tree limbs.

Mary Jo and Glenn Kleinert report they completed a traditional dry stacked rock wall across part of their property. The wall, primarily for erosion control and rainfall runoff retention, is also a great flower bed for drought resistant native plants which they have started planting.

After the hail storm Sterlin spotted a swarm of hundreds of bees in a tree by his driveway. Before he could get his camera they flew off and disappeared. Guess they had taken refuge in the storm.