



INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

Sept./Oct. 2014

News, events & calendar of the Indian Trail Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists...Serving Ellis and Navarro Counties

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From the Desk of the **PRESIDENT**

Eileen Berger, President ITMN

Can you tell that the sun is already beginning to slant a little, and that chair you always sit in is no longer in the shade at 4:00 P.M.? If you have had a fairly lazy summer, as I have, prepare yourself for plenty of opportunities to get out and enjoy nature, as well as get some volunteer hours. Our night hike on Oct. 4 will be new for some of you, and we hope you will get as excited as we do about showing folks some nighttime fun. Read the advanced training options and plan to attend one or several. With cooler weather and some rain, it should become more pleasant to venture out. See you outdoors.

INSIDE *this issue*

2-5	Project Views
6	Trintiy River canoe trip
7	Natural Profile: Jim Patak
7-8	Engeling Refuge
9-10	Fox Squirrels
10	Thoughts of a Not-So-Natural-ist
11	Book review

Calendar of Events, Projects & Meetings **SEPTEMBER**

- 1 Get Back to Nature on Labor Day! 8-12; Cedar Ridge Preserve
- 6 BRIT First Saturday; Vineyard/Orchard Day 8-1; Farmers' Mkt. 8-12
- 13 MNP Wildflower Walk 9 a.m., Midlothian
- 13 Volunteer Training 9-3:30; Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center, Cedar Hill
- 15 MNP Workday, 9 a.m., Midlothian
- 22 ITMN Chapter Meeting 6-9:00 p.m.; Into the Prairie, A Celebration of Native Grasses by Rick Jaynes, Texas Master Naturalist; FUMC, Waxahachie
- 24 Night Hike Practice, Mockingbird Nature Park, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Midlothian

OCTOBER

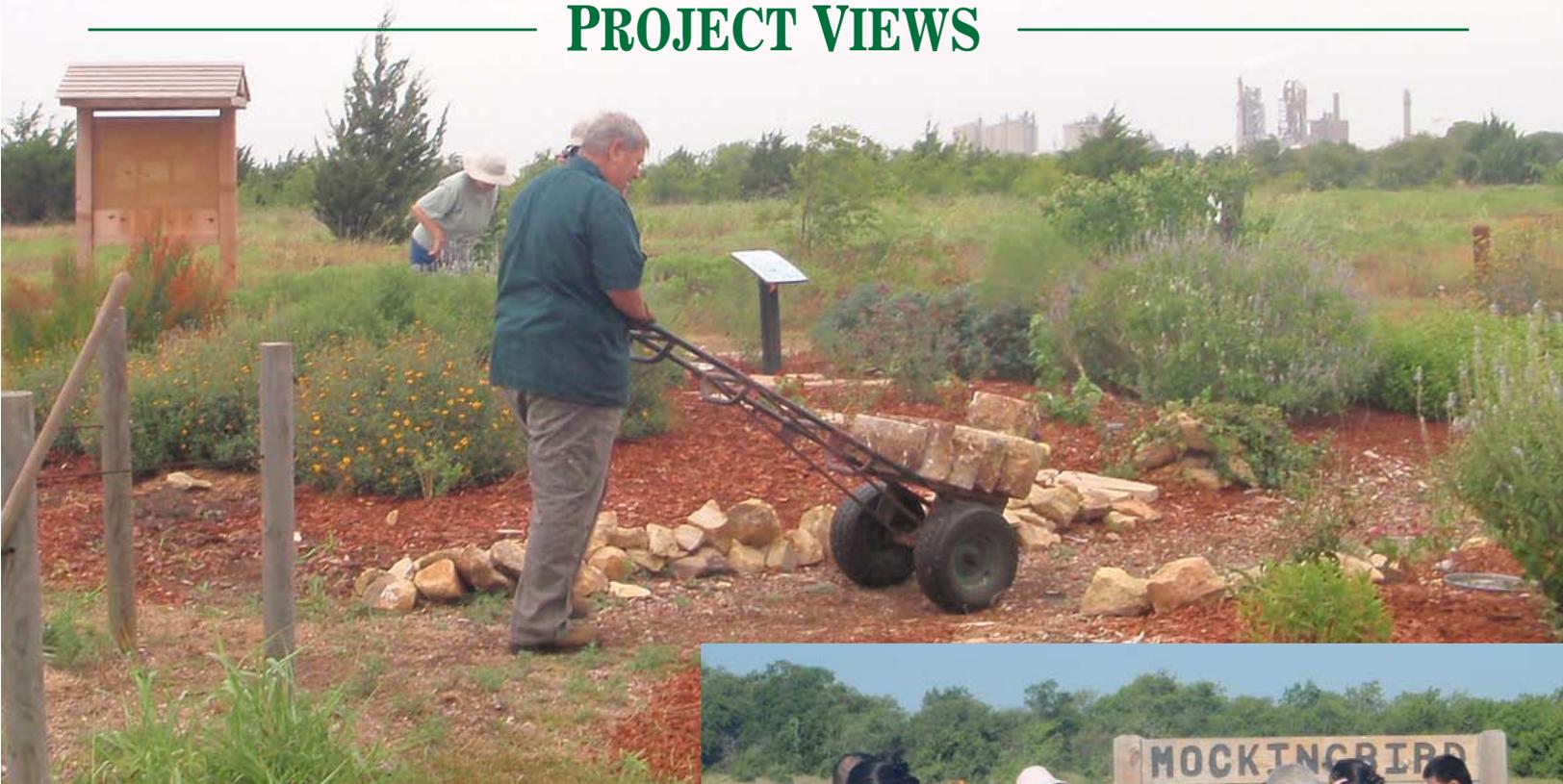
- 2 Night Hike Practice, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Mockingbird Nature Park, Midlothian
- 4 Night Hike, Mockingbird Nature Park, 7:30 p.m., Midlothian
- 4 BRIT First Saturday; Fall Harvest 8-1; Farmers Mkt. 8-12
- 6 MNP Workday 9 a.m., Midlothian
- 11 MNP Wildflower Walk 9 a.m., Midlothian
- 18 Kachina Prairie Workday 9 a.m., Ennis
- 20 MNP Workday 9 a.m., Midlothian
- 20 ITMN Board Meeting 6-9:00; Ryan's Steakhouse, Waxahachie
- 24-26 Texas Master Naturalist 15th Annual Meeting, Mo Ranch, Hunt, TX
- 24 Kachina Prairie Workday 9 a.m., Ennis
- 27 ITMN Chapter Meeting 6-9:00 p.m.; Bats by Rebecca Schumacher, Texas Master Naturalist

NOVEMBER

- 1 BRIT First Saturday; Reading Literacy 10-1
- 15 Kachina Prairie Workday, 9 a.m., Ennis
- 17 ITMN Chapter Meeting 6-9:00 p.m.; Election; Recycling and Methane Gas Capture by Greta Calvery, Waste Management Spokesperson
- 21 Kachina Prairie Workday, 9 a.m., Ennis
- 26 ITMN Chapter Meeting: 6:00 - 9:00 pm, Firewise/Burn Restoration by Derek Broman, First UMC, Waxahachie

Meeting 4th Monday of each month at 6 p.m., program at 7 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, Waxahachie

PROJECT VIEWS



MOCKINGBIRD NATURE PARK
WORKDAY



PROJECT VIEWS

Pollinator Walk

& Talk at Mockingbird Nature Park



PROJECT VIEWS

All Ennis, all the time. ITMN with the mayor of Ennis and other dignitaries at Kachina Prairie. The debut of the ITMN booth at the Ennis Farmer's Market.



PROJECT VIEWS



Texas Bluebird Society

Summer Symposium



TRINITY RIVER CANOE TRIP



Hooded Mergansers

Photos © Jim West

by Eileen Berger

Several weeks ago, during one of our unusual “cold fronts”, I noticed an e-mail invitation to take part in a “pop-up” canoe trip down the Trinity River. It was sponsored by Trinity River Audubon Center, also known as TRAC, in Dallas, to take place from 6:00 P.M. until 8:30 P.M. The weather forecast predicted temperatures in the 70’s, with a pretty good chance of rain. I actually own a canoe, but it is too heavy for me to handle by myself. I had always wanted to canoe down the river, but many things held me back, least of all the problem of how to get back to my car after the trip.

As a child, I helped my father build a

wooden-frame canoe using plans from a 1940’s era Boy’s Life Magazine. Our family took the canoe to Belton Reservoir, and to creeks and rivers near our home in



Damselfly

Temple, Texas. We would launch and paddle around the edge of the lake, or go for short distances in the Leon and Lampasas Rivers, but never so far that we would need a ride. So, although I know how to paddle and launch, I had never had a chance to actually go on a “canoe trip”.

The trip was limited to 16 people. We gathered in a classroom to go over basic techniques, talk about what we might see, and pick out a personal flotation device (life jacket) that fit. All the equipment was provided by

the Center, as well as transportation to the place we would enter the river. We all took one last bathroom break, gathered up our water bottles, applied insect repellent and headed to the new bus which TRAC had just acquired. After a short ride, we walked down a boat ramp to the canoes, which had been hauled on a trailer by one of our guides. Another TRAC employee who was not going on the trip then drove the truck and trailer back to the Audubon Center.

We had already paired off in groups of two, and proceeded to board our canoes. Ben Jones, the director of TRAC and one of our guides, had jokingly reassured us that although we would get our feet wet, hopefully we would otherwise stay dry. He also told us that the water would be cleaner than we might expect. Thankfully we did not see any dead fish or other indicators of pollution, although we did see numerous large areas of litter, mostly Styrofoam and plastic. It also did not have any unpleasant odors.

The river was moving slowly so that we barely needed to paddle at all, other than to steer clear of a few tree trunks. We saw huge trees growing along the bank, and a few beavers, but no other animals. Friends who have traveled the river have reported seeing alligators. We did see tracks in the mud, probably made by raccoons. I also had expected to be bothered by mosquitoes, but did not see any. The trip down the river lasted about an hour and covered two miles. Luckily, our trip just missed being rained out, as it rained heavily later that night. The trip was something that I would never have had the courage or resources to do on my own, and I was glad I came. I highly recommend the experience to anyone wanting to safely explore our beautiful Trinity River.

<http://www.trinityriver.audubon.org/learn-explore>

NATURAL PROFILE

GETTING TO KNOW JIM PATAK, CLASS OF 2014

by Kathleen Mack

How did you learn about ITMN?

My oldest granddaughter and I attended a night hike at MNP. We learned that the park was created by this group of volunteers. I thought “how cool was that!”

What made you decide to join?

I decided I wanted to be involved in these type projects.

What activities are you involved in for ITMN?

Primarily, the Kachina Prairie restoration. I am also the Class 2014 representative on the ITMN Board.



What would you like to achieve as an ITMN?

Restoration of Kachina Prairie.

Anything else you would like to add?

I live in Ennis where I was born and raised. I am widowed and I have two grown adult children with three granddaughters, ages 14, 5, 2. I'm a retired Postal Service Safety Specialist. My hobbies are hunting, fishing, farming, all things outdoors.

The Gus A. Engeling Wildlife Management Area

by George Lawton

On many trips to Nacogdoches, we passed the Gus Engeling Wildlife Management Area (GEWMA) near Palestine, TX. It was always “Someday we ought to stop and look at the place”, knowing that we probably never would. That changed when we became Master Naturalists. We recently drove through the area and were amazed.

GEWMA is part of the Middle Trinity River Ecosystem Project, which includes Richland Creek, Big Lake Bottom, Keechi Creek and Cedar Creek Islands Wildlife Management Areas. There are 10,958 acres of land owned and operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The area was selected as a land base for the Post Oak Savannah Ecological Region to develop and manage wildlife habitats and populations of indigenous wildlife species. It is also a site for research of wildlife populations and habitats, conducted under controlled conditions by many universities and colleges.

The area was originally named after Mr. Miles Derden, who owned a large portion of the original property. The name was later changed to the Gus

Engeling Wildlife Management Area in honor of wildlife biologist Gus A. Engeling, who was killed by a waterfowl poacher in the area in December, 1951.

Topographically, the area is gently rolling sand hills that transition into flat, highly productive hardwood bottomlands. Seven spring-fed streams originate on GEWMA that normally flow year-round. The climate is moist and sub-humid with an annual rainfall of about 40 inches. The vegetation consists of a deciduous forest of oak, hickory, sweet gum and elm. Associated understory include dogwood, American beautyberry, huckleberry, hawthorn, yaupon, greenbrier and rattan. Shade-tolerant grasses and forbs make up a sparse cover on the forest floor. A few of the resident wildlife species that are frequently seen include white-tailed deer (we saw two the day we were there), wild turkeys, fox and gray squirrels, raccoons, armadillos, beavers, coyotes, rabbits, bobcats, gray fox, wood ducks and alligators. Over 35 mammal, 165 bird, 65 reptile and amphibian, 55 fish and 980 plant species (including three known carnivorous plant species) have been documented in the management area.

A wetland habitat has been developed through a cooperative joint waterfowl management venture by TPWD and Ducks Unlimited, Inc. The wetland habitats attract large numbers of water birds and migratory

continued

Engeling *continued*

waterfowl. With 120 nest boxes available, wetland habitats on GEWMA have a year-round population of wood ducks.

Throughout the GEWMA there are large signs describing what is going on in the particular area. One area was the large beaver pond covered with what appeared to be water lilies. A boardwalk goes out into the pond. We did not see any beavers that day. Another sign explains the prescribed burning and fallow disking used to manage wildlife habitats. There is a very long driving trail the ranger says is beautiful in the spring when the dogwoods and early spring wildflowers are in bloom. The gate to the alligator area was closed the day

we went so we could not see the alligators up close. The ranger also said there were large breeding grounds for the eastern wild turkey which almost became extinct due to over-hunting in Texas.

As with all areas of Mother Nature, the scenery changes by seasons. The ranger said summer is the most miserable due to the heat, humidity, mosquitoes, and chiggers. He said fall was better because of the fall colors of the leaves, and spring is great because of the flowering plants. So we plan to go again this fall and early next spring. The ranger also said that with enough notice, we could get a private tour of the GEWMA, seeing areas the public does not get to see. So, who's up for a road trip?



Depth gauge at Mockingbird Park The city of Midlothian installed the depth gauge in the pond on July 22. Thanks to Billy King, Craig Railsback and crew.



Familiar Bluet damselfly perched on Indian blanket

Photo © Jim West

MARK YOUR CALENDARS
MIDLOTHIAN VOLUNTEER DINNER
12 JAN 2015 in the Convention Center
MIDLOTHIAN WINTER WALK
at MOCKINGBIRD PARK
28 FEB 2015

CRAZY LIKE A FOX

Fox Squirrel, That Is.

by Travis N. Edwards

For most of us, our daily connection with the natural world unfolds around us in our yards, parks, and neighborhoods. While tending our gardens we may find an interesting insect, or watch colorful birds visit the birdfeeders we have set up for them. The wildlife that immediately surrounds us seem docile,



© Phil Myers, Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

and content to be a part of our domestic landscape. We forget that these creatures are wild and that they are part of a continual predator and prey drama that happens on a daily basis. I know. I have watched it occur a couple of times, even in my own backyard.

Most of us have seen squirrels running around in our yards and parks. One of the more common species in our area is the Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*). They are a large squirrel with a reddish brown color. I have watched these squirrels for years and have noticed that they, well, act a little crazy. One minute they are peacefully finding food in a yard, the next minute they are scurrying up a tree only to come back down to repeat the same process over, and over, and over again. One minute they are scampering along in the yard, the next minute they are completely motionless. Although I am personifying them as crazy, I know that they are being cautious, as they should be. Squirrels are on the

menu for many predators such as coyotes, bobcats, owls, and Red-Tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*).

Red-Tailed hawks are a common hawk in our area. They are known for their large size and their reddish colored tail feathers, hence the name. These hawks can be seen hunting from an exposed perch, such as a tree limb or power poles. They can also be seen soaring on thermal currents in the sky. I was fortunate enough to witness two separate occasions when these majestic hawks tried to capture Fox Squirrels for a meal. The drama plays out so fast that you may not believe what you are watching, while you are watching it!

As I remember it, my family and I were on our way to church on a beautiful, sunny, Sunday morning. As I drove through our neighborhood I noticed a Fox Squirrel digging in the open area of a neighbor's yard. Suddenly, the squirrel went into a commotion I had never witnessed before. The squirrel started running one direction, and then another, and then back towards the first direction. I started thinking, "What is that crazy squirrel doing?", when my thoughts were interrupted by a Red-Tailed hawk rapidly descending over my vehicle and towards the squirrel!

I could not believe my eyes as the squirrel began running towards the street. I knew the hawk would surely catch the squirrel in the open. The hawk banked its flight and started heading towards the point where he could overtake the squirrel. As the hawk closed the gap and began to put its legs out front to catch the squirrel, the squirrel, at the last possible moment, made a 180° turn and escaped by running under the hawk and opposite the hawk's direction of travel. Unable to adjust its flight pattern in time, the hawk landed and looked over its shoulder while the squirrel escaped into my neighbor's shrubs. By this point I had stopped to watch the entire event unfold. The majestic hawk then burst into flight and out of our view, still hungry.

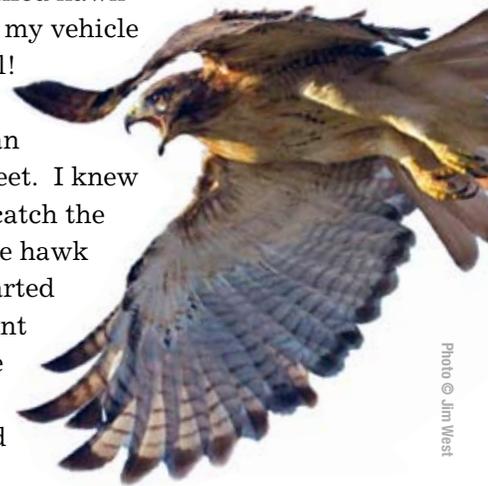


Photo © Jim West

continued

CRAZY *continued*

This very same scenario played out in my backyard a few weeks later. While visiting with family, I was watching two Mourning Doves (*Zenaidura macroura*) and a Fox Squirrel enjoying the spilled bird seed from my backyard birdfeeder. The scene was peaceful for about ten minutes. Without warning the doves exploded into flight and the squirrel began the antics of running one direction, then another, and then back towards the first direction. Again, my initial thoughts were, “What is that crazy squirrel doing?” when into my view appeared a Red-Tailed hawk plummeting out of the sky and towards the squirrel. Once again, the squirrel escaped by running under the hawk, with inches to spare. The hawk landed, looked over its

shoulder, and watched the squirrel escape by running over my backyard fence. It happened so fast that I tried to quickly tell my family what I had just witnessed. I could not get the words out of my mouth fast enough. Despite my unintelligible babble, everyone raced to the window to see what was left of the spectacle, but both the hawk and squirrel had left my yard.

I was fortunate to witness the predator/prey drama so close to home. It reminded me that although our neighborhoods may be peaceful and quiet, the sometimes violent struggle for life continues around us. With that in mind, I am looking forward to watching the Red-Tailed hawks try to catch another Fox Squirrel. Who knows, maybe the third time is a charm for the hawks?

SIGHTINGS BY A NOT-SO-MASTER NATURALIST

By Christine Cook

As humans, it is so easy for us to forget that millions of other parallel lives go on around us, mostly without our notice. But in the last two weeks I’ve been “bugged”, so to speak, three times by unexpected close-up encounters with some of those whose space I share.

The first time, I had left a cardboard tray of bedding plants on the arm of my porch chair because it had gotten too dark to plant them. The next morning when I went out to get the job done, I gasped to see the most beautiful insect hanging, unmoving, from the edge of the box. It was a cicada (aka

locust), newly “born again,” clinging to its old shell. Its wings were a filagree of Martha Stewart-green, as were its legs. It stayed in that same position for many hours, but I had to run errands that afternoon and did not get to see it move or leave. I felt almost like a privileged spy or a voyeur, but a humbled one.

The second bugging, again across the front porch, was when I was in the pathway of a fuzzy, orange-striped crawler moving quickly toward my foot

in a very direct, no nonsense manner; duh, I moved! (The duh comes from teaching sixth graders...). If you have never seen a velvet ant, check it out online. And, just like Texans, don’t mess with ‘em. One variety of them is known as the cow killer, so even if you don’t moo, be careful if you like to go barefoot outdoors. Also, the velvet ant isn’t one-ant, that is. It is a wasp and has a very painful bite/sting.

My third up-close and personal surprise was when I went out in the early morning to talk to and touch (weird, huh?) my plants. Right there on the mulch lay the most perfect-looking katydid. She looked fresh, amazing in bright green leaf camouflage, no sign of distress or violence, but quite gone. And gone to the



little box in which, for a while, she now resides on my kitchen windowsill.

I wonder, what will “bug” me next?

NATURAL reads

Book review by George Lawton

Edible and Useful Plants of Texas and the Southwest: A Practical Guide

ISBN: 978-0-292-78164-1 by Delena Tull

While rummaging through Hastings looking for a good wildflower identification book, I ran across a book titled *Edible and Useful Plants of Texas and the Southwest* by Delena Tull. Many of us in ITMN are familiar with plant identification, but how many of us know which plants are edible, what parts are edible, which are poisonous, and which are useful?

Delena Tull shares that knowledge in this book, one of the first focused specifically on plants that grow in Texas and surrounding regions of the Southwest. Included are recipes such as Turk's Cap Jelly and Acorn Waffles. There is a list of 25 plants (including Goldenrod, Clover, and Yarrow) used in making various teas. You will find 15 plants (including Juniper, Sweet Bay, and Wax Myrtle) used as spices.

If you are interested in using plants to color materials, an entire chapter is devoted to preparing plants and dyeing wool and cotton. In other chapters,

you will find instructions for using plants to weave baskets and make paper and soap.

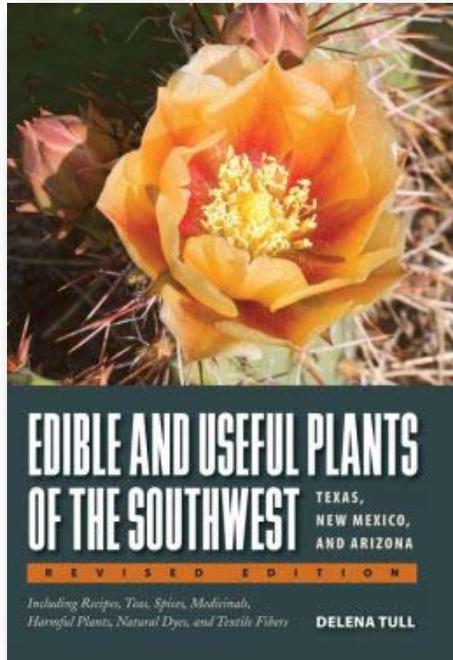
Tull has included sections on medicinal plants, poisonous plants, hay fever plants, edible and poisonous berries, and plant characteristics. Also included are many black and white drawings and color plates of the plants.

One of the most interesting sections is about the history of plants and their use by our ancestors. In Greek mythology, violets are part of the story of Hera, the queen of the gods. Hera caught her husband, Zeus,

flirting with Io, the daughter of the river god. To hide Io's beauty from his wife, the king of the gods turned Io into a heifer. Hera suspected her husband's trick. She demanded that he give her the heifer, which she kept under guard. Zeus created the violet as a fragrant food for Io to eat until he could set her free. The Greek word for violet is "ion".

Whether you're a naturalist leading a wildflower walk or an individual hiking along a trail, this book will help tremendously in making your experience more interesting. Or, if you are ever caught in the zombie apocalypse, you will have knowledge of what to eat and what not to eat in the

wild, as well as which plants to use for basket-making and dyeing clothes.



MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM MISSION:

To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities.

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The mission of this newsletter is to inform, educate and entertain Indian Trail Master Naturalists and their circle of friends.
