



INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

Mar./Apr. 2015

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

701 S. I-35E, Suite 3, Waxahachie, TX 75165 | Office: 972-825-5175 | Visit our website at <http://txmn.org/indiantrail>

From the Desk of the PRESIDENT

Charlie Grindstaff, President ITMN

Wow! Ya'll are AWESOME! After our Planning & Board Meeting last month I must admit that I was very impressed with all of the good ideas we discussed but I was very nervous because only one member had jumped on board to chair one of those great ideas. At our January Meeting you volunteered and created committees for every idea. Phew! We are going to have a great year! Ya'll make my job so easy. Thank you! Thank you! Did we hit the ground running? No, we hit it building bluebird houses – 258 of them in only 4 half-days. And while Mother Nature has been busy rearranging our schedules, we know her best weather and best floral displays are coming soon. Also coming soon is the Ellis County Master Gardeners EXPO. This event brings in between 3 and 5 thousand visitors, our exposure is phenomenal. The importance of participation by each member can not be emphasized enough. Wear your Master Naturalist shirt and sign up to work our main booth or our children's table. But before then, there is a lot of work to be done, plastic drink bottles to be collected and cut, wooden pollinator houses to be built and the filler materials to be gathered. Good ideas, good people, good presentation...Let's make this our best EXPO yet.

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

Calendar of Events, Projects & Meetings MARCH

- 7 BRIT Workday 9 a.m.
Tour of Waste Management Skyline Landfill in Ferris 9 a.m.
Advanced Stream Team Training at River Legacy 9 a.m.
- 8 Daylight Saving Time begins
- 21 Kachina Prairie Workday 9 a.m.
John Bunker Sands Wetland Center Nature Kids 10 a.m.
Colors of Nature Walk at Mockingbird Nature Park 9 a.m.
- 23 ITMN Monthly Meeting 6 p.m.; Butterflies of North Texas with Dale Clark 7 p.m.
- 27 Kachina Prairie Workday 9 a.m.
EXPO set up booth 5 p.m.
- 28 Ellis County Master Gardeners EXPO 9 a.m.

APRIL

- 4 BRIT Workday at 9 a.m.
Wildflower Walk at Kachina Prairie with Jim Varnum 10 a.m.
- 5 March Activity Report due to Michaela Kral
- 6 Workday at Mockingbird Nature Park 9 a.m.
- 10 Springlake 4-H tour at Mockingbird Nature Park 4 p.m.
- 11 Earth Day Celebration in Ferris 10 a.m.
Workday at Kachina Prairie 8 a.m.
- 18 Ennis Bluebonnet Trails Festival
Wildflower Walk at Kachina Prairie 11 a.m.
Nature Walk at Mockingbird Nature Park 9 a.m.
John Bunker Sands Wetland Center Nature Kids 10 a.m.
- 19 Ennis Bluebonnet Trails Festival
Wildflower Walk at Kachina Prairie 2 p.m.
- 20 Workday at Mockingbird Nature Park 9 a.m.
ITMN Board Meeting at Ryan's in Waxahachie 6 p.m.
- 22 President's Meeting in Denton 10 a.m.
- 24 Workday at Kachina Prairie 8 a.m.
- 25 Submission Deadline for Trail Marker
- 26 Chaetura Canyon Tour 9 a.m.
- 27 ITMN Meeting 6 p.m.; 50 Birds to Teach Your Kids or Grandkids with Jack Dunaway 7 p.m.
- 29 L.A.N.D.S. Field Day at Trinity Bluff Ranch
- 30 L.A.N.D.S. Field Day at Bear Creek Ranch

MAY

- 4 Workday at Mockingbird Nature Park
- 5 April Activity Report due to Michaela Kral
- L.A.N.D.S. Field Day at John Bunker Sands Wetland Center

PROJECT VIEWS



Thirteen members made it to Bullard Heights Neighborhood Park to decorate a cluster of trees. Don Happ has the park looking really good.

We have 5 small Red flowering Hummingbird bushes planted at the school entrance to Mockingbird Nature Park. Soil conditions for planting were excellent,(numerous).



Thank you to everyone who came & if you brought your spouse thank them too. The Ellis County Extension Service gave each attendee a nice 2015 pocket calendar & pen. If you could not attend, you can pick up one at the AgOffice while supplies last.

Each year the Master Gardeners put ivy vines with silk flowers &

candleholders on the tables for the centerpieces (see picture 4 above). I am going to suggest that next year ITMN put our collective creative genius to work & volunteer to do the centerpieces. Since the dinner is always in January, I am thinking maybe we could do something with bird treats for the attendees to take

home & hang on their trees, but I am sure several of you have even better ideas just waiting to get out. We have a year to think but I hope you will start thinking now so we have plenty of time to gather & assemble whatever materials we might need.



Interseasonal Ramblings **Texas Style**



by Christine Cook

One of the many hundreds of sayings attributed to the Texas mystique goes like this: "If you don't like the weather, just wait a day or two." After living in both Big Spring and Ennis for a total of 47yrs. (that still makes me a Yankee), I can personally attest to the truth of that statement this week.

Let me back up a bit to explain. Prior to February, we did have many cold days with some temperatures in the teens and twenties and quite a bit of encouragement for cozy fires and good books...(and you Minnesotans and New Englanders wonder why we even have fireplaces?). But long about the middle of February, a spate of several warm days in the 50's, 60's, and even the 70's brought out the green growth and the burgeoning buds of early spring. Many here did the happy dance! My daffodils and paper whites were in full bloom, pear and plum trees began to flower, and lots of us talked about seeing our first bluebonnet. A walk on the Ennis Kachina Prairie showed us the harbingers of our abundant wildflower display to come.

During the warmth, I flew to sunny California for a short family visit and totally missed the gods laughing at us back here in Texas! Real snow on the prairie, not just the August flowers of that name that to us always signaled the approach of school time. I was sent a photo of our prairie bison, outstanding in his field in his new white coat. Then, to rub it in that I was missing my favorite precipitation, my daughter the teacher calls, and I find out about school being cancelled

two days in a row. My return flight plans were delayed a day, and I was lucky to arrive on the only day for most of the workweek when the roads were clear before the ice hit again. It's cold and wet today, but up to 73 in two days, and then more cold and possible ice due in. So yeh, like we say, just wait a day or two

Today in a light drizzle I walked our prairie again. In wetness, all the greens along the path were a brilliant emerald, like I think of Ireland being. Hugging the ground and jeweled with water droplets were the early growth of grasses, Engelmann daisies, mustard, dandelions, Indian blanket, thistles, and bluebonnets, plus many more that I could not name. Sumac sported its fat buds, and a few shrubs showed baby leaves. The birds had eaten all the treats we hung out on the bare tree limbs in January, leaving behind the pinecones now cleaned of peanut butter and birdseed.

But I was happy to still see the tree "skeletons" that to me are symbols of the strength and beauty of the winter season. I love the inward aspect of winter, a time for resting, for reloading the heart and the mind and the home. I'm older now and in no rush for spring—let it come slowly and last "longly" as it displays its own wonders. Winter can stay for a while, and I can still hunker down with a good book...until it all changes again in a couple of Texas days!

RAY FIELD

BLUEBIRDS WRENS

3

2

by Dan & Deborah Rayfield

It is the middle of winter and too cold for a baseball score and whoever heard of a football team called the Wrens? So, what gives? Read on, nature lover.

While it is still cold outside, spring is coming. In Texas it can come early. So now is the time to do your nest box maintenance and clean-up. It is an easy process, requires few tools and is an excellent excuse to get outside on one of our pretty winter days

Our kit consists of a screwdriver, small putty knife, old paintbrush, small mirror, gloves, notebook, extra nails and screws, and a bar of Ivory soap. We keep



Photos © Jim West

everything together in one container so you can just grab it and go when the weather cooperates.

If you have multiple nest boxes, they should be numbered in some way so you can monitor usage over the years. Open the box and take a look inside. You can learn a lot by observing the nest. Nest identification is easy but we will cover that in a future article. After you have identified the species of bird that built it, use your putty knife to carefully remove

the nest. Be careful to stay upwind from the dust and use a disposable mask if you are so inclined. First check to see if there are any eggs left in the nest and record that in your notebook. If the nest is deep, that is, if it reaches from the bottom of the box to near the opening, you may have multiple or sequential nests built one on top of the other. Sequential nests indicate a productive couple and a good location for the box. You can sometimes see a clue where one nest ended and the next one began. If so, carefully separate the nest column at that point and check for eggs. After observing the nest, it is a good idea to dispose of it well away from the nest box as the remaining scent can lure predators to the area.

Once the box is empty, observe the inside front below the opening.

Fecal material there is a positive sign. When the baby birds fledge, or fly out, it is probably pretty scary and, well you can see the results. The traditional notification to your nest box monitoring partner is to turn and say, "Houston, we had lift-off!". But feel free to improvise your own success notification phrase.

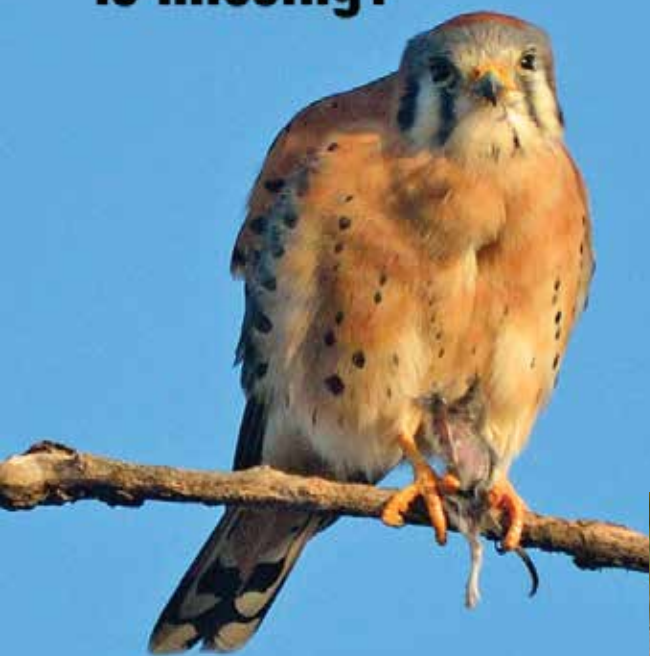
Next use your old paintbrush and putty knife to clean out any spider webs and other nest remnants. Check for any missing or loose nails or screws. Finally, rub the Ivory soap around all openings and the ceiling in the nest box. That tends to discourage wasps and other insects, although it is not a perfect solution.

That's it. You're done. Just close up the box and know that you have helped a hard working pair of birds bring more babies into the world. And a world with more bluebirds is a better world indeed.

Oh, I almost forgot to explain the score. On our five nest box trail at Mockingbird Nature Park we observed that all boxes had been used. Three contained bluebird nests and two contained either a Bewick's wren or Carolina wren nest. Two of the bluebird nests were multiples. To quote Sinatra, "It was a very good year."



**So, wait, your what
is missing?**



Ease on over here and let mama have a look at you...



Just ignore him.

Showoff.



THE HIDDEN VOICES OF NATURE. *by Jim West*

**I'm hit, I'm hit,
goin' down...**



**JUMP!
JUMP!
JUMP!**

C'MON, DO IT!



Drat!



NATURAL

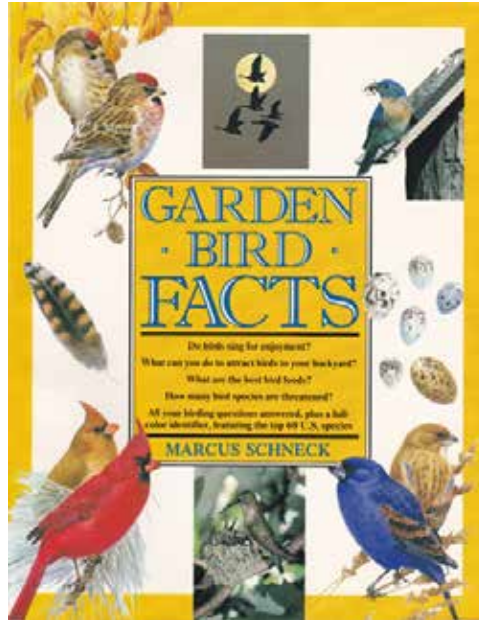
reads

Book review by Charlie Grindstaff

Garden Bird Facts by Marcus Schneck

ISBN 0-7607-0204-7 © 1992 Quarto Publishing

Garden Bird Facts by Marcus Schneck is a wonderful book for anyone who is curious about birds but doesn't want to become an ornithologist. One third of the book covers such intriguing questions as when and where did birds originate; how do birds fly; what are the best plants for birds; and why are eggs different colors. Each question has a page of answers with a page of photos and/or drawings to illustrate those answers. None of this is earth-shaking new information but it is well written and easily understood. Among the answers to the question, "What is a bird garden?" Schneck suggests letting the birds plant their own garden probably near the back of your property since it will end up being a "tangled hedgerow-type affair of wild plants." Create a bed 5 feet wide by whatever



length you choose, prepare the soil as you would for a vegetable garden, set a staggered line of fence posts through the plot connected with a wire about 5 feet off the ground. Birds are attracted to the lines for perching and will plant the seeds of whatever plants they've been eating through their droppings. The variety of plants they plant will include grasses, weeds, wildflowers, vegetables, shrubs, vines & even small trees. Leave it alone for the first two years to allow any perennials the time they need to fully develop; trim and shape beginning the third year.

The other two thirds of the book is a bird directory of the 100 most common backyard birds. In addition to the account of their lifestyle, these pages include an illustration of the bird and its egg, with a spotter's checklist of plumage, bill, feet, body length, size, habitat, food and a written depiction of their song.

I really enjoyed this book and it is perfectly titled "Garden Bird Facts" because the 8 1/2 x 11" size makes it too unwieldy for a field guide.

Marcus Schneck is an outdoor editor and environmental contributor who has been writing about nature and the outdoors for over three decades. He has authored thousands of newspaper and magazine articles, as well as two dozen books.



Goodie bag raffle winner Dan Rayfield modeling the sunbonnet (snowbonnet?) he won at the February meeting. The goodie bag also held sunflower seeds, a carbon footprint calculator and other sundry items as well as the bonnet handcrafted by Sara Cornett. The raffle raised \$45 for the Bison Fund. Thank you everyone for your donations.

Hot chicks putting out bird treats for cold chicks at Mockingbird Nature Park.



INSECTS OF MOCKINGBIRD NATURE PARK



BEETLES

Black Blister Beetle *Epicauta pennsylvanica*
Red Milkweed Beetle *Tetraopes tetrophthalms*
Green June Beetle *Cotinis nitida*
Three-lined Potato Beetle *Lema daturaphila*
Red Lady Beetle *Cycloneda munda*



BUGS

Small Milkweed Bug *Lygaeus kalmia*
Large Milkweed Bug *Oncopeltus fasciatus*
Milkweed Bug nymphs
Eastern Leaf-footed Bug *Leptoglossus phyllopus*



BUTTERFLIES



Northern Cloudywing *Thorybes pylades*
Common Checkered Skipper *Pyrgus communis*
American Lady *Vanessa virginiensis*
American Snout *Libytheana carinenta*
Black Swallowtail *Papilio polyxenes*
Common Buckeye *Junonia coenia*
Giant Swallowtail *Papilio cressphontes*
Gulf Fritillary *Agraulis vanillae*
Monarch *Danaus plexippus*
Queen *Danaus gilippus*
Varigated Fritillary *Euptoieta claudia*
Phaon Crescent *Phyciodes phaon*
Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*
Dainty Sulphur *Nathalis iole*
Tawny Emperor *Asterocampa clyton*
Hackberry Emperor *Asterocampa celtis*
Pipevine Swallowtail *Battus philenor*
Eastern Tiger *Papilio glaucus*
Great Purple Hairstreak *Atlides halesus*
Gray Hairstreak *Strymon melinus*
Comma sp. *Polygonia sp.*
Skipper sp.
Checkered White ♀ *Pontia protodice*



MOTHS

Fractured Western Snout Moth *Diastictis fracturalis*



DAMSEL AND DRAGONFLIES

Familiar Bluet *Enallagma civile*
Swift Setwing *Dythemis velox*
Widow Skimmer *Libellula luctuosa*
Black Saddlebags *Tamea lacerata*
Blue Dasher *Pachydiplax longipennis*
Roseate Skimmer *Orthemis ferruginea*
Green Darner *Anax junius*
Eastern Amberwing *Perithemis tenera*
Dot-winged Baskettail *Epithea petechialis*
Banded Pennant *Celithemis fasciata*



GRASSHOPPERS/CRICKETS

Three-banded Grasshopper *Hadrotettix trifasciatus*
Kiowa Grasshopper *Trachyrhachys kiowa*
Two-striped Mirmiria Grasshopper *Mermiria bivittata*
Wrinkled grasshopper *Hippiscus ocelote*
Keeler;s Spur-throated grasshopper *Melanoplus keeleri*
Obscure bird grasshopper *Schistocerca obscura*
White-whiskered grasshopper *Ageneotettix deorum*
Texas Spotted Range grasshopper *Psoloessa texana*
Short-winged Green grasshopper *Dichromorpha viridis*
Big-headed grasshopper *Aulocara ellioti*
Prairie Boopie *Boopedon gracile*

Camel Cricket *Ceuthophilus sp.*



SPIDERS and kin

Phidippus ardens
Phidippus texanus
Rabid Wolf Spider *Rabidosa rabida*
Argiope Spider *Argiope aurantia*
Harvestman (kin)
Araneus sp.



MANTID

Chinese Mantis *Tenodera aridifolia sinensis*



WALKINGSTICK

Common Walkingstick *Diapheromera femorata*



BEES

American Bumblebee *Bombus pensylvanicus*
Eastern Bumblebee *Bombus impatiens*
Eastern Carpenter Bee *Xylocopa virginica*
Honey Bee *Apis mellifera*
Leaf cutter bee *Megachile brevis*
Anthophora sp.



WASPS

Spider Wasp *Entypus unifasciatus*
Metallic green cuckoo wasp sp.
Blue-winged wasp *Scolia dubia*
Paper wasp *Polistes sp*
Eastern Velvet Ant *Dasymutilla occidentalis*
Sand wasp *Bicyrtes sp.*



FLIES



Bee fly *Systoechus solitus*
Bee fly *Poecilanthrax Lucifer*
Bee Fly *Hemipenthes sinuosa*
Robber fly *Efferia sp.*
Robber fly *Promachus hinei*
Argid Sawfly sp.
Beelzebub Bee-eater *Mallophora leschenaultia*
Mydas Fly *Mydas clavatus*



CICADAS

Cicada *Tibicen superb*



SCALE

Cochineal scale *Dactylopius coccus*



ANTS

Cheese Ant *Forelius mccooki*
Acrobat Ant *Crematogaster*
Fire Ant *Solenopsis xyloni*

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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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, February 2, 2015

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President/CEO
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Whooping Crane Festival News Brief

19th Annual Whooping Crane Festival

February 19-22, 2015

Port Aransas, Texas

www.whoopingcranefestival.org or (800) 45-COAST

(Port Aransas, TX) Early registration for the annual Whooping Crane Festival scheduled for February 19th – 22nd closes on Monday, February 9th. Please go to www.whoopingcranefestival.org to take advantage of reserving the activities of your choice as several tours are already full! As the festival has grown over the years, so has the variety of nature related activities and experiences, and this year is no exception.

Opportunities for birding field trips and workshops, and a variety of photography workshops and trips are still available. Professional photographer Larry Ditto will assist and teach several workshops from novice to expert in a variety of different settings including many field trips to put your techniques to the test.

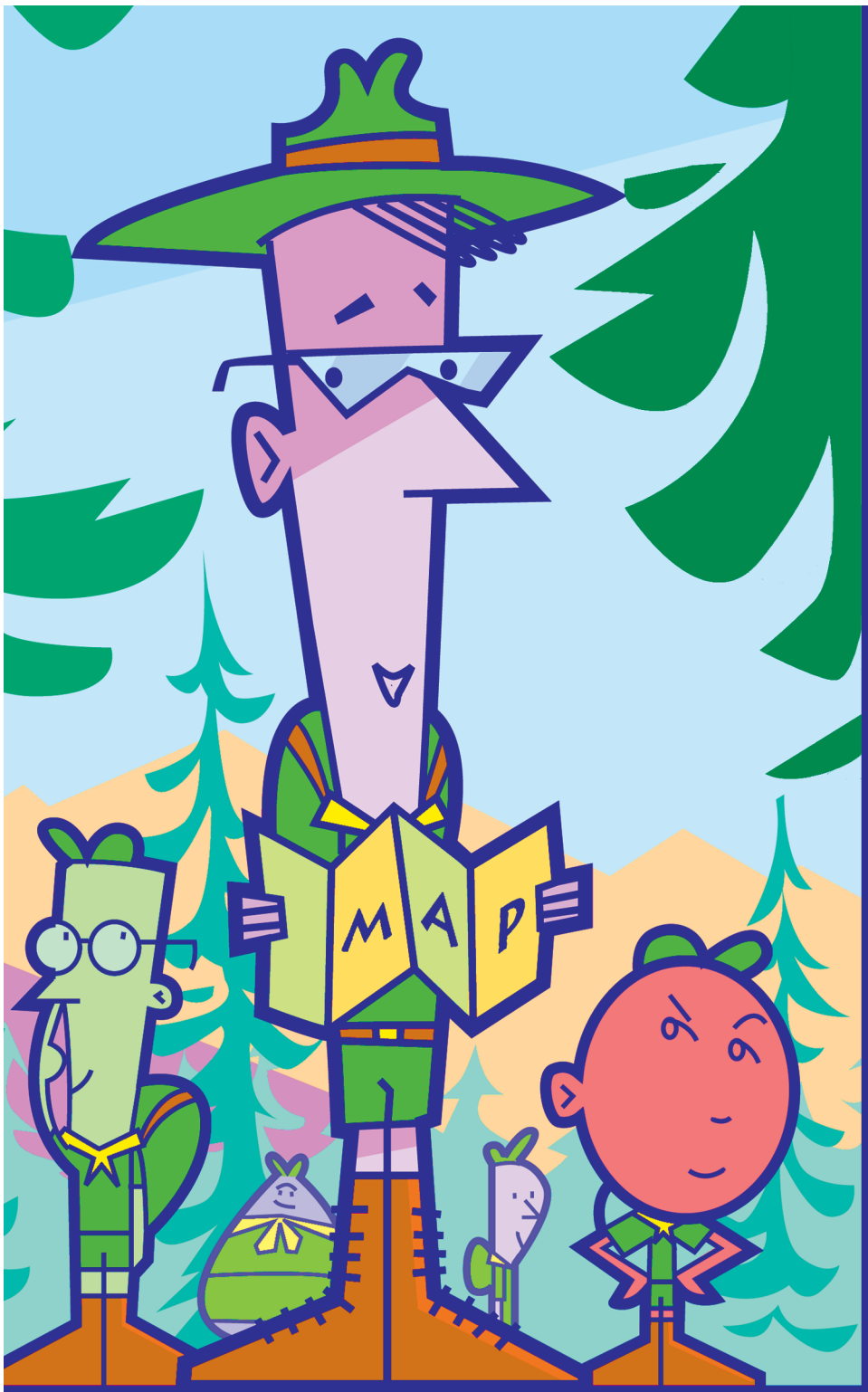
Among the expert speakers are Cecilia Riley (*Gulf Coast Bird Observatory*) who will talk about conservation and birds, and Jace Tunnell (*Mission Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve*) will show off the newest addition to The University of Texas Marine Science Institute, the *Estuary Explorium*. Joe Duff (*Operation Migration*) will discuss his work with guiding the Cranes behind his ultralight aircraft. Rounding out the festival are several other experts from the International Crane Foundation who will discuss a variety of topics regarding the Whooping Cranes.

The festival is sponsored by Cheniere, Eagle Optics, HEB, Port Corpus Christi and Swarovski Optik, as well as many local partners and is proud to be a nature-related and educational festival which stands out as “one of a kind,” focusing on conservation and recovery of one of our most endangered species.

For more information & registration visit: www.whoopingcranefestival.org.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & VISITORS BUREAU

403 W. Cotter • Port Aransas, Texas 78373 • 800-45-COAST or 361-749-5919



OPPORTUNITY TO WORK ON YOUR SCOUT **BADGES**

plan to attend
the



**Saturday,
March 28**

at Lone Star College-Montgomery

Choose from a variety of activities!

Kayaking Skills Tank (skills and safety) • Archery (skill and safety)

Fly Fishing • Rod & Reel fishing (fishing/boating safety)

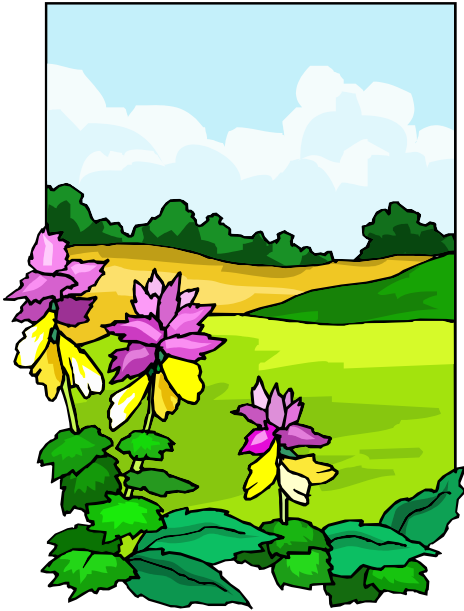
Jakes Take Aim BB Gun Range (gun safety) • Hands on crafts with lessons

Baytown Nature Center touch tank (aquatic) • GPS, Orienteering & Compass

Wildlife-live animals (wildlife) • Wolves of St Francis (rescue/rehabilitation)

Dutch Oven Society with History (history)

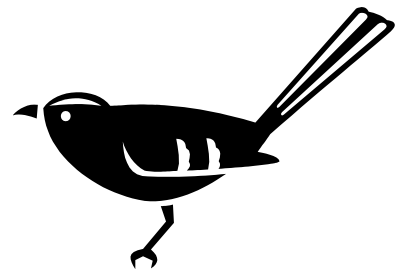
<http://expo.tamu.edu>



Wildflower Bird Walk

Members of the Indian Trail Chapter of
the Texas Master Naturalist Program
will be leading a combined Wildflower and Bird Walk the at
9am the first and third Monday of
June, July and August at

Mockingbird Nature Park



Join us on this ½ mile stroll along the trails as we identify the
wildflowers and birds. The public is invited to attend, and there
is no charge. Participants should bring drinking water and
binoculars for bird watching.

The walk will be canceled if raining.

Serving Ellis and Navarro Counties Visit: <http://txmn.org/indiantrail/> Email: Information@itmnc.com



Indian Trail Texas Master Naturalist Chapter