



# INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

WINTER 24

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



## From the Desk of the President

### *Trailblazers, Happy New Year!*

Happy New Year! I'm excited to begin the new year in the role of chapter president and wanted to take a minute to introduce myself. I am a member of the 2021 class, and I served as the training chair for 2022 and 2023. I enjoyed every minute of getting to know the newest members over the last couple years and engaging with them in meetings and various projects. Being fairly new to the chapter, I'm still getting to know many of the rest of you, and I have appreciated all the insight and history you have shared with me along the way. I am here to serve you, so please do not hesitate to reach out with questions, thoughts and ideas!

As we say goodbye to 2023, I want to thank the leaders of this chapter who have provided mentorship and support

as you have transitioned your roles to others. Specifically, thank you to Rena for modeling leadership to me both in her role as training chair and as president and for allowing me the opportunity to grow into this new position. Thank you to Sue for being an impeccable Treasurer and supporting Mary as she moves into the role as Treasurer. Thank you to Charlie for being a deep and generous well of expertise for every role! And thank you to all the officers, committee members, project chairs and volunteer liaisons who have agreed to continue serving in various ways in 2024. You provide the framework that makes the work we do in nature possible! In the spirit of the new year, the State Office has offered five New Year's Resolutions for a Texas Master Naturalist that I want to share with you:

### **New Year's Resolutions for a Texas Master Naturalist**

**Attend every #TMNTTuesdays in 2024.**

**Learn something new!**

**Travel and visit other Master Naturalists.**

**Attend the 2024 Annual Meeting.**

**Volunteer more and get outside.**

We have lots of projects coming up this year, all of which need volunteers and several of which need chairs. Please take a look at our chapter calendar on the website and the minutes from our December planning meeting and see where you might like to get plugged in. I look forward to seeing you on the trail!

**Erin McKool, President Indian Trail Chapter**

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**Indian Trail Master Naturalist Newsletter Team**

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Melanie Gibson, Chair    Ann Spencer, Editor  
Robbie Robbins, Coordinator    Dottie Love, Production Designer

Monthly meetings are held on the 4th Monday (usually) of each month at 6 p.m., program at 7 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, Waxahachie. Our office is located in TexasAgrilife at 701 S. I-35E, Suite 3, Waxahachie, TX 75165 (972)825-5175. Visit our website at <http://txmn.org/indiantrail>

On the cover: "Bobcat" by Robbie Robbins

This page: "White Moth" by Tom Sale



## Report: ITMN STATE MEETING

Story and photos by Rena Sutphin

I had never attended a state meeting until this year. I was quite excited when I figured out that I had no conflicts and could go this year when it was held in McAllen in the heart of the Rio Grande Valley. Sue Frary and I agreed to share the drive and hotel room, so it was a no-brainer.

We later learned that Sheila Cloonen would be there also. We met up with her on the first evening there and found some decent seafood for dinner.

The next day we visited Quinta Mazatlán, a beautiful public garden that was once a private home. We saw beautiful plants and lots of wildlife including many chachalaca roaming around. We then returned to the convention center and went to the training that we had registered for. I learned a great deal about Texas Horned Lizards.

We spent the next day birding on some of the sites that were designated as field trip sites. None of us had been able to get into any of these field trips, so we just went on our own and had a wonderful time. Sue took hundreds of pictures of many of the birds that are only found in that part of Texas.

Saturday everyone at the meeting went to Eclipse Day at El Sauz Ranch, which is owned by the East Foundation. We viewed the eclipse, learned from various topic speakers, ate lunch, and



Sue Frary, Rena Sutphin, and Sheila Cloonen

attended field-based advanced training sessions. The El Sauz Ranch hosts a unique diversity of landscapes and land management practices with active sand dunes, thornscrub brush, ocelots, an active cattle herd, university research projects, burn management plans, and so much more. They bring students to the ranch throughout the school year to learn about this diversity. We had a great time there.

We attended the awards dinner where Sheila and I were both mentioned by name regarding our respective milestones. There were many awards given for milestones all the way up to 30,000 hours! They did not even have a pin to recognize that many hours, so now they are designing one. And Sue won the blue ribbon for her quilt.

All in all, it was a really fun long weekend. I plan to attend more state meetings in years to come. San Marcos next year will be fun!



Day of the Dead LED sculpture in McAllen



Sue Frary



"Lichen" by Dottie Love



## *Birding the Annual Meeting!*

Story and photos by Sue Frary

Of course when you go to a Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting, you should go to all those wonderful presentations on all sorts of Naturalist subjects that are offered over the four days. Of course.

But of course, if the location of the meeting is in the southern Rio Grande Valley during the fall bird migration, in this year's case in McAllen, the many internationally famous birding sites found there may be calling youuuuuuuuu...



And of course they did. Rena Sutphin and I played hooky from the meeting a bit and went birding. Though we are not officially "Birders" with a capital "B," we like seeing ones we have never seen

before, aka "Lifers," and the unique ones you have to have photographs of, aka "Bucket Birds." And because all of the official field trips for birding offered by the Meeting were mysteriously full when the signups opened, we had to improvise...



My target bird was the Green Jay (*Cyanocorax yncas*). You only find it in the Valley and along the very southern Texas coast, so I wanted to find one, or more. It was not a lifer for Rena, she had been there before, but it was for me – and as I like to photograph birds, it was a bucket bird as well.

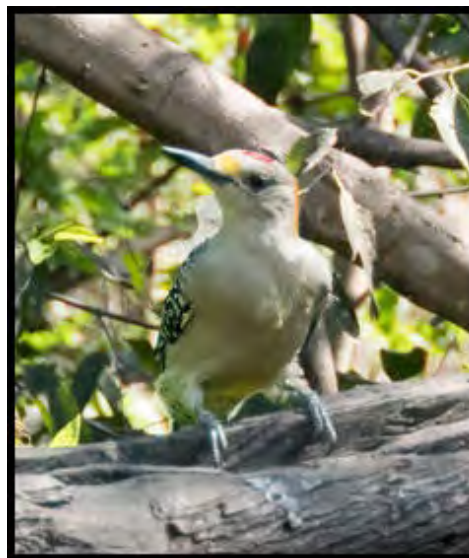
We visited several birding sites near McAllen – the lovely Quinta Mazatlan estate, the Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, the McAllen Nature Park, and the National Butterfly Center (which oddly has birding stations). Green Jays are everywhere; people set up feeders in the Valley it seems. It's a snazzy bird rivaling the Painted Bunting for a photographer. But in the thorn forest environment they live in, they are hard to see at a distance as their coloration almost perfectly matches the sunlit woods. But they seem to come to feeding stations in bunches. Bucket bird check in the National Butterfly Center of all places! That blue thing on his face isn't the eye, it's an eyebrow!



One of the more interesting birding sites was the Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Mission TX, not far from the McAllen meeting location. During the peak of the bird migration in November, they feed birds at their many feeding stations and get international birders visiting our southern border. It is an odd state park. It's right along the Rio Grande with the border wall running right through it, but the park is large enough so you don't see the wall except going in and out. You get wristbands to

show you have permission to be on the property. The park has a handy tram that runs around the park in an hourly circuit, so you can bird the many blinds without having to walk much.

So Rena and I are riding the tram back to the headquarters building and suddenly Rena hollers "Stop, Stop! Bird!" The tram driver laughingly came to a halt. I didn't see what she saw but got out with the camera anyway. Rena says "Oriole!" (Or an orange something hard to see in the scrub.) We chased it for a bit, then he went across the road and sat up for a portrait. It was an Altamira Oriole (*Icterus gularis*), another very very south Texas species. *Rena's Oriole!* It looks at first glance like a Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*), whose breeding range is along the Rio Grande Valley, but the orange on its shoulder feathers gives it away as an Altamira. The Hooded Oriole shoulder feathers are white. He was a bit spooked and didn't stay long, but we were happy to get a shot that wasn't "bird butt." The photograph will give you an idea of the impenetrable thorny scrub in this habitat. If a bird gets more than 10 feet or so into it, you won't see it at all, even when it's orange, so we considered ourselves lucky.





All in all, Rena and I had a great trip, though a long drive down and back. It's interesting to see the Tamaulipan thorn forest ecosystem – very short trees and scrub, very dense. Good for birds and habitat for the few Ocelots remaining in Texas.



Here's a list of the birds we got photos of: Altamira Oriole, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Curve-billed Thrasher, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Inca Dove, Summer Tanager, Plain Chachalaca, Tropical Kingbird, Anhinga, Grebe sp.

And we did go to *some* of the Meeting meetings!



Rena Sutphin and Sue Frary



"Witchgrass, Ennis Texas" by Dottie Love



## **Report: 2023 End of Season Monarch Tagging**



by Amanda Weatherly

As of December 14, 2023, the total monarch butterflies tagged by the awesome Texas Master Naturalist Indian Trail Chapter volunteers has come to an approximate total of 112. The number should be slightly higher by 30-40 butterflies, but there are a few volunteers who have not officially reported back to me for the comprehensive report.

We averaged a 50-60 percent success rate for tagging this year. Last year 141 butterflies were successfully tagged. In a year-to-year comparison, as a chapter we seem to tag approximately 150 butterflies a year.

With this knowledge carrying over to next season I will be planning to order 150-200 tags, depending on how many people sign up. I would like to thank all of the dedicated taggers and I look forward to working with you again next season.

For the new trainees, please look for the 2024 Monarch Tagging Season signup/information table at the July stated meeting if you are interested in participating in the project.

## Watching Winter Wildlife

Story and photos by Tabitha Brobston

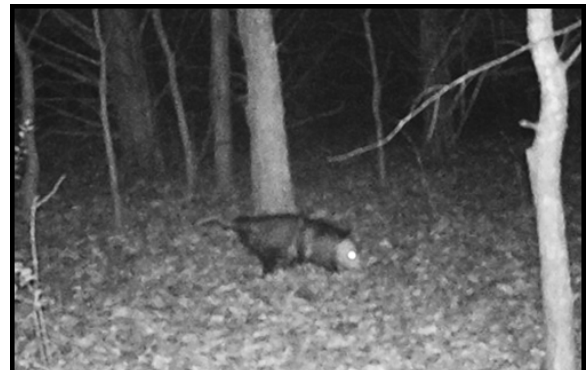
As winter slows down the plant growth and chills the insects, our activity as master naturalists tends to slow down as well.

Though it can be easy to write off this time as a one that harbors little life, trail cameras might paint a different story. With help from Rachel Richtner from Texas Parks and Wildlife, volunteers placed three game cameras on the Charles F. Ladd Nature Preserve in Duncanville this winter, and we were happily surprised with the range of wildlife we saw in just a few short weeks.



When we checked on the cameras, we found an array of different species thriving (or at least surviving) despite the colder weather. We expected to see common species such as American crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), fox squirrels (*Sciurus niger*), raccoons (*Procyon lotor*), and coyotes (*Canis latrans*) – all of which were present in

the footage recovered from the cameras alongside an opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*), beavers (*Castor canadensis*), great blue herons (*Ardea herodias*), and plenty of curious humans and their canine companions.



However, we had our fingers crossed that we might see some of the rarer and more shy native wildlife as well – and



the cameras far exceeded our expectations. River otters (*Lontra canadensis*), which are considered vulnerable in our ecoregion, were spotted on two separate cameras; our native gray foxes (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) frolicked together; an owl perched at the edge of the camera's range; and a bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) prowled its territory both day and night.



The footage also allowed us to understand more about the interactions and lives of the preserve's animals. We were able to capture the interaction between two different species; in one photo, a great blue heron chases off a river otter.



The beavers can be seen hard at work moving branches and logs right past the camera in multiple photographs. We could even see the effects of parasitism; some of the coyotes were seen with varying stages of mange, which acts as an unfortunate, but necessary, method of natural population control.



More important than any one image, however, is the sheer variety of animals we were able to photograph in just the two weeks that the cameras have been operational. It proves how valuable the Ladd property is for native biodiversity, as well as just how much life can be found among us, even in urban environments or in the midst of the winter months.



# *Watching the Eclipse*

Annular Eclipse project on October 14, 2023 found more than 100 people who turned out at Midlothian Mockingbird Park to see the “ring of fire.” Matt Bacon led the event.



Photos by Ann Spencer



## The Draw of Mount Ida Arkansas

Being an avid rockhound and following other like-minded folk on Facebook, I noticed a certain place kept coming up for seeking and also, for digging: Mount Ida Arkansas.

by Sheila Cloonen



Photo courtesy of Ron Coleman Mining [colemanquartz.com](http://colemanquartz.com)

People come from all over the U.S. to dig in the dirt for an elusive perfect quartz crystal. It's not just quartz, though. Many other rockhound "gems" are also hidden away in this red soil.

Mount Ida is located in the Ouachita National Forest about an hour west of Hot Springs. It is the oldest and largest National Forest in the south, encompassing 1.8 million acres in Arkansas and Oklahoma. It is also the home to Lake Ouachita, a 40,000 acre lake known for having some of the cleanest water in the U.S. Lake Ouachita, pronounced “wash-a-taw,” is the largest lake in Arkansas and possibly one of the most beautiful with the Ouachita mountain range serving as its backdrop.

Mount Ida is considered the quartz crystal capital of the U.S. and is known worldwide for its quartz deposits. So, what makes Mount Ida home to the largest crystal mines in the U.S.? The quartz crystals found here were formed around 245 million years ago by tectonic plate movement combined with weathering from wind and rain. Silica-rich solutions circulated through fractured sandstone and shale, precipitating large amounts of quartz in complex vein systems.

These quartz-filled veins are concentrated in a 30-40 mile wide and 170 mile long zone that represents the geologic core of the Ouachita Mountains. Tectonic movement has pushed many of these veins to the surface allowing for easy access. The rock beds in Mount Ida contain other minerals as well. Among those are fluorite, or fluorspar, tourmaline, calcite, pyrite, mica and barite.

Native Americans were very familiar with this crystal rich area. Archaeologists have dated the oldest known

artifact made from Arkansas rock crystal to an arrowhead to around 9000 BCE. Today it is used in various electronic devices such as radios, radars, and chronometers because of its piezoelectric properties.

Mount Ida and its surrounding area is home to several quartz mines that allow visitors to search and dig for their own crystals for a small to moderate fee. Most of these are associated with rock shops just in case digging is not your thing. The Ouachita National Forest also boasts several spots where folks can hunt for gemstones on their own or join guided tours offered by local outfitters. Searching the rivers and streams, you can find calcite clusters, opalized petrified wood, fossils, staurolite or “fairy crosses,” geodes filled with crystals and even diamonds.



Make sure you go prepared. Sturdy footwear is needed due to uneven terrain. Long-sleeved shirts and pants for protection from the sun and bug bites are a good idea, too. Keep in mind that the soil you will be digging in is red clay and will stain. Digging tools, a bucket (or bag), water and snacks will make for a much more enjoyable experience. And, while you're in the area be sure to check out the beautiful Ouachita National Recreation Trail that follows the scenic Ouachita Mountain range for 220 miles.





**Colorful Fall tree  
Spreading colors for my eye  
Autumn is now here**

Photo by Madeline Kelley-Schwoch  
Haiku by Matt Bacon

# NATURE BOOK NERDS NEWS

by Alleasha Austin

## Hello, Nature Readers!

Book Club met January 9 and discussed the books “Braiding Sweetgrass,” by Robin Wall Kimmerer and “Goodbye to a River,” by John Graves. Everyone agreed that both books are inspirational in their own way and definitely worth the read.

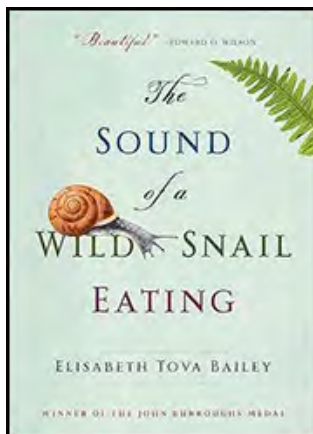
If you attend book club, you may enter it as one hour of advanced training: Look for AT: Nature Book Nerds Club: TMN AT Report Hours. Be sure to include the titles of the books we discussed. We meet the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at Waxahachie Parks, 401 S. Elm Street.

## Mark your calendars:

February 6: Read “Wild DFW,” by Amy Martin. Amy Martin will be at our book club meeting!

March 5: Read “The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating,” by Elizabeth Tova Bailey and/or “The Nature Book: What It Is and Where It Lives,” by Marianne Taylor.

Happy Reading!



Photos courtesy of Amazon.com

## *Let's "Feed the Birds" February 10, 2024*

Everyone needs more fuel in winter,  
especially our fine feathered friends!

Laura Beattie (East Parks Coordinator) and Jessica Willis (West Parks Coordinator) are busy gathering materials for making tasty bird treats to set out at our area parks.

Here are a few recipes if you'd like to make treats in advance or if you'd like to make treats to use in your own yard:

### **Bark Butter for Birds**

Servings: 11 CUPS  
Prep Time: 5 MINUTES

#### **Ingredients**

8 ounces lard  
2 cups peanut butter  
(may also substitute any nut butter)  
4 cups cornmeal  
2 cups rolled oats  
2 cups mixed bird seed (if using nuts, be sure to use unroasted, no-salt nuts)



#### **Instructions**

1. In a food processor, process the lard, peanut butter and cornmeal until it's a smooth paste.
2. Add the rolled oats and process until well blended.
3. Add the bird seed or nuts and process until well blended.
4. Store at room temperature in a wide-mouth airtight container.



## Krunchy Kabobs

### INGREDIENTS

Fruit: any combination of apple, orange, cherry, prunes, large berries and/or fruits from ornamental trees or shrubs, like crabapples, and/or wild fruits like wild plums, cherries  
Pasta Alfredo Pieces (page 56), Mockingbird Mini-muffins (page 50), and/or Woodpecker Waffle Pieces (page 70)

### TOOLS

Wooden kabobs or skewers  
String or yarn

### DIRECTIONS

#### STEP 1

Hit the trail around your house and gather berries, ornamental cherries and crabapples, or use fruit that you already have on hand. Wash the fruit. If it is large, cut it into 1- to 2-inch cubes or slices. (Hint: The cut fruit must be large enough to stay together when inserted onto the kabob stick.)

#### STEP 2

Arrange a combination of fruit, pasta loops, mini-muffins, and/or 2-inch waffle pieces, to make a 6-inch chain on the table or counter. Then poke each piece onto the kabob stick, leaving enough room at the ends to tie a string.

#### STEP 3

Tightly tie the ends of a 16- to 20-inch length of string around each end of the kabob. Pipe cleaners can also be used. Add tape to the very ends so that the string will not slip off. The ends can also be set with glue to secure the string or pipe cleaner in place. (Hint: If you do not have kabob skewers, reuse your campfire marshmallow roasting sticks!)

#### STEP 4

Hang the treats from a tree branch or feeder support and watch for birds to kkkkrunch on kabobs!

### ATTRACTS



Cedar Waxwing



Gray Jay



Summer Tanager



American Robin



### NOTES

Birds that eat fruit take cues from color, texture and taste to determine when the fruit is at its peak in energy content (sugar). Some birds can see ultraviolet (UV) light. Many ripe fruits reflect UV light, but the leaves around them do not. This directs birds to the ripe fruit and a fast lunch. Plant fruit trees in your yard for a treat both you and wildlife can enjoy.

**ALSO ATTRACTS:** Northern Flicker; Northern Cardinal; Blue, Gray and Western Scrub Jays; Gray Catbird; Rose-breasted Grosbeak; Northern Mockingbird; Summer Tanager

## Quacker Crackers

### INGREDIENTS

½ cup cornmeal  
1 cup of oatmeal  
(moderately ground in food processor)  
¼ cup melted suet base  
½ cup water

### TOOLS

Pizza cutter  
Baking sheet  
Hot pad

### DIRECTIONS

#### STEP 1

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

#### STEP 2

Combine the cornmeal, finely ground oatmeal, melted suet and water.

#### STEP 3

Roll the dough with a rolling pin until thin, about the thickness of a quarter.

#### STEP 4

With a pizza cutter, cut the dough into 1-inch x 1-inch squares, or be creative and make your own bird-sized cracker shapes with mini-cookie cutters. Prick the cracker tops with the tines of a fork.

#### STEP 5

Bake for 10-12 minutes. Remove from the oven. Cool.

### ATTRACTS



Mallard



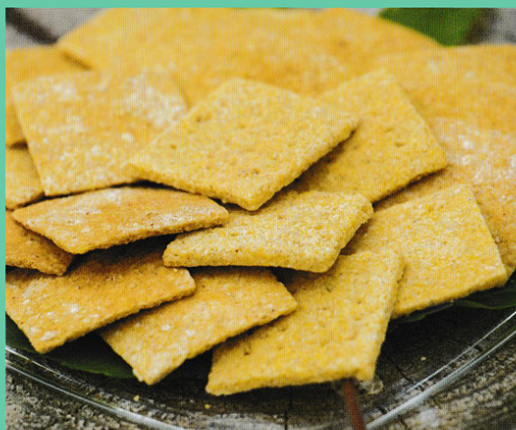
American Black Duck



Canada Goose



Wood Duck



### NOTES

Gritty, grainy, smooth, hard or juicy, when a bird decides to eat one food over another, it has more to do with texture than taste. Birds generally have few taste buds and a poor sense of taste, but their tongue has a detailed system of sensors that allows them to tell food items apart. Add to the menu by landscaping with natural plants that provide migratory birds food throughout the year. In rural areas, plant rows of corn, sorghum and other grains for migratory birds. The plants will also provide winter cover for local wildlife. Also, when feeding ducks be aware that one duck can attract many others, so be sure to check your local ordinances, which sometimes prohibit feeding of waterfowl.

**ALSO ATTRACTS:** Rock Pigeon; Mourning Dove; Eastern and Spotted Towhees; Chipping Sparrow

*Take along a sketchbook and/or camera to record your waterside adventures. Can you determine male, female, adult and young birds from each other? Take notes on their behaviors, too.*

## Mockingbird Mini-muffins

### INGREDIENTS

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup cornmeal  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup flour  
 1 tablespoon baking powder  
 1 cup of any combination of:  
 cranberries, cherries,  
 blueberries, raisins,  
 or nuts and dried mealworms

1 egg  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup warm milk  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup melted suet

### TOOLS

Mini-muffin pan  
 Mini-muffin cups  
 Raffia, twine, or string

### DIRECTIONS

#### STEP 1

Preheat oven to 400°F. Place mini-muffin cups in the mini-muffin pan. In a bowl, mix together the cornmeal, flour, baking powder, and fruit, or mealworm and nuts, according to the season.

#### STEP 2

Break the egg into a separate bowl and mix well. Warm the milk in a microwave. Melt the suet in a microwave. Mix the egg, milk and suet until well blended.

#### STEP 3

Make a well in the middle of the cornmeal mixture. Pour the egg mixture into the center and stir all the ingredients together just until the cornmeal is moistened. It is ok if the batter is lumpy.

#### STEP 4

Fill each muffin cup  $\frac{2}{3}$  full with batter. Bake for 12-15 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from the oven and cool. Remove the paper from the muffins.

#### STEP 5

Make a small hook at the base of a pipe cleaner. Push the top of the pipe cleaner up through the bottom of the muffin so the long end comes through the top of the muffin. Hang the treats on plants or attach to a feeder support. Watch for mockingbirds, robins, catbirds and more to munch on your magnificent muffins.

### ATTRACTS



Northern Mockingbird



Steller's Jay



Northern Cardinal



American Robin



### NOTES

Mockingbirds can eat nearly anything. They eat insects, seeds, fruit and berries, depending on the season; they are omnivorous. During summer months they eat more insects and in the winter more fruit and berries. You can add seasonal favorites to these muffins. In winter, add cranberries, blueberries, raisins and cherries. In the summer, mix in extra protein—nuts and dried mealworms.

**ALSO ATTRACTS:** Mourning Dove; Gray Catbird; Black-headed Grosbeak; Blue Jay

## Raisin-berry Relish

### INGREDIENTS

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup orange juice  
 1 cup raisins or currants  
 1 10-ounce package (about 3 cups)  
 of fresh or frozen cranberries  
 1 cup brown sugar

### TOOLS

Half of an orange rind, or  
 another serving container

### DIRECTIONS

#### STEP 1

Pour the orange juice over the raisins, cranberries and sugar in a heavy saucepan. Stir well. Heat the mixture on medium-high until it starts to bubble. Carefully stir the hot mixture.

#### STEP 2

Turn down the heat to low and put a cover on the pan. Simmer for 30 minutes or until the berries pop. Remove from the heat and cool.

#### STEP 3

Be creative with your food presentation. There are many options of how to offer this treat to birds. Fill empty orange halves with the mixture (Oriole Oranges, page 54). Make surprise muffins: Fill the mini-muffin cups one-third full with Mockingbird Mini-muffin batter (page 50); next, place a teaspoon of relish on the batter, and then fill the muffin cup the remaining two-thirds full with batter. Bake as directed. For a simple presentation, place the relish in a clean, empty 6-ounce tuna can and set outside in a predator-free area.

#### STEP 4

For a no-cook relish, soak the raisins and cranberries in orange juice overnight or until they are plump. Add chopped apples to the relish.

### ATTRACTS



Northern Cardinal



Eastern Bluebird



Cedar Waxwing



Steller's Jay



male Baltimore Oriole

### NOTES

In the wild, birds spend large amounts of energy foraging for food. The availability of fruit is seasonal, especially in the North. Backyard bird feeding provides birds with a wide variety of foods all year long, and scientists are still researching how much of an advantage birds receive from this type of feeding. The effects of global warming are being researched as well. Set out this fruit-filled relish and note the date, time and numbers of bird species that come to dine. Report your findings to a citizen science project (page 25) and be a part of solving the mysteries!

**ALSO ATTRACTS:** Bohemian Waxwing; American Robin; Red-bellied Woodpecker; Summer Tanager; Baltimore Oriole; Gray Catbird; Brown Thrasher; White-crowned Sparrow





A Crested Caracara getting the stinkeye from a Crow whose confederates lie in wait for their cue, just outside of the shot.

# MR. WEST'S NEIGHBORHOOD

I've seen lots of changes in my neighborhood over the years and more recently, they seem to be more pronounced. One example of that is the number of bugs on your windshield. I roam a swamp and drive along a river at various times during the day. In past years, I've had my windshield covered with insect remains which have been noticeably absent for the last few years. A number of bird and insect species that I normally encounter are rare or missing altogether. I attribute this to lawn chemicals, pesticides and herbicides used in agriculture and, climate change. No wildflowers (aka weeds) = fewer insects = fewer birds. There are lots of shorebirds and ducks on the ponds and fields but, they are not as dependent on insects in their diet nor do they live in close proximity to humans.



Green Tree Frog, One. The one in this photo is a very rare anomaly, 69 out of two million according to a Cornell U. study.

Normally in late fall, hawks of all kinds begin to show up in large numbers. Migrating Red-tailed hawks become as common as pigeons with Kestrels a close second with one on the utility lines about every 1/2 mile until I run out of road. About a dozen Northern harriers winter in the area, as near as I can determine. This year, just a couple. One thing that I have noticed is that there are more Crows than I have ever seen here. Likely they may play a part in the absence of raptors by their aggressive pursuit of them anywhere they come in contact.

Mr. West's neighborhood, Mr. West's opinion but, I do read a lot. Here are photos of some of the missing. JW



Scorpionfly, One



Robberfly, None



Swamp Sparrow, None





Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute, Fort Davis Texas, by Dottie Love

Indian Trail Marker

Newsletter Winter 2024

## PHOTOTIPS

### DIY MADE EASY.

If your camera has a manual focus setting, don't be afraid to use it. It can be your best ally in situations like the one to the right, where creatures are showing you what camouflage is all about. A lot of cameras will hunt, focus in and out, trying to find the sweet spot. When shooting nature, you seldom have time for that so it's much faster and easier just to do it yourself. Most cameras have an 'in focus' indicator in the viewfinder which, I find myself using often when I shoot with one of my ancient, manual focus lenses, which brings up another matter. There are a lot of used older lenses, some with legendary sharpness, available for a lot less \$. Cheap enough that you can obtain one to practice your focusing skills with. The drawback being that they tend to be much slower but, only until you get the hang of it. *JW*



Wilson's Snipe



# ***Fall's End Time***

by Madeline Kelley-Schwoch



*There's a cool, dampness all around me.....*

*I can see the yellow, brown and red leaves on my sidewalk and lawn*

*To paint a portrait on my lawn*

*Little twigs of green grass pop out to say hey it's not all gone yet...I'm still here*



*And the skeletons that we call trees that are left behind  
when their leaves go away*

*The bluebonnets are showing their green leaves, but there's  
no blue yet...*

*The blue will come later in the spring, there are pink roses on  
the trailing rose bushes*



*The deer bush has its yellow flowers so it's not completely winter yet...  
I'm thankful for that.*



*Life has its ups and downs in November and December...  
old memories of past times come to play in our lives...some good, some sad*



*Winter solstice is almost upon us and nature will  
live the shortest day of the year  
Then we and the world around us will begin again,  
and hopefully all of the animals, trees, grasses and  
flowers will make their presence known in our  
lives...*



## What are these scratches?

3 messages

Dottie Love &lt;dottieruthlove@gmail.com&gt;

Thu, Oct 26, 2023 at 8:35 PM

To: sam.kieschnick@tpwd.texas.gov

Hi Sam! One of your big fans here. I was just this minute talking to Tim Brys about you, and we agreed you have a LOT of fans! I'm Dottie Love, Indian Trail MN. I have these weird scratches on a mesquite tree on our property in Ennis, right by Lake Bardwell. 25 acres, mesquite poor pasture, and a lot of Zebu Cattle. We could not find any other trees like this altho we didn't search very hard. They start at the base and go up into the branches. My friend from the Pacific Northwest says it's a cougar. Or a bear. Whaaat is it? Thanks! Dottie



Dottie Love &lt;dottieruthlove@gmail.com&gt;

## Re: What are these scratches?

1 message

Sam Kieschnick &lt;Sam.kieschnick@tpwd.texas.gov&gt;

Fri, Oct 27, 2023 at 8:29 AM

To: Dottie Love &lt;dottieruthlove@gmail.com&gt;

Hey Dottie!

What an interesting mystery!!! So, I'll honestly say that I don't know exactly, buuuuut with the 'scratches' or 'scars' going all the way up the tree, it makes me wonder if they were lightning struck! I did a little google search on trees struck by lightning, and some of them look somewhat similar:

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/forestry/caring-for-lightning-struck-trees/>

What do you think?

Sam Kieschnick

Urban Wildlife Biologist, DFW

Texas Parks and Wildlife

214-215-5605 (c)

[@sambiology](#)
**From:** Dottie Love <dottieruthlove@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Friday, October 27, 2023 4:15 PM

**To:** Sam Kieschnick <[Sam.kieschnick@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:Sam.kieschnick@tpwd.texas.gov)>

**Subject:** Re: Re: What are these scratches?

One word. Chupacabra.



### INDIAN TRAIL CHAPTER MASTER NATURALIST BOARD

**Chapter 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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"Things I Found in the Creek" by Tom Sale