



INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

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

Fall 2024



INDIAN TRAIL MASTER NATURALIST NEWSLETTER TEAM

indiantrailnews@itmntx.org

Melanie Gibson, Chair

Robbie Robbins, Production Designer

Ann Spencer, Editor

Tabby Brobston, Editor

COVER PHOTO of the Charles F. Ladd Nature Preserve by Mark Graham

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.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President: Erin McKool.....erinmckool@me.com

VP/Programs: Madeline Kelley-Schwochm.a.kelley@sbcglobal.net

Treasurer: Sue Frary.....aggiemom@mac.com

Secretary: Maegan Bacon.....maegan.bacon@gmail.com

Past President: Rena Sutphin.....renasutphin@yahoo.com

For additional information about the Indian Trail Master Naturalist Chapter please visit:

For the Public:

Becoming a Master Naturalist: <https://txmn.org/indiantrail/about/become-a-master-naturalist/>General Inquiries: <https://txmn.org/indiantrail/contact-us-2/>

For ITMN Members Only:

Committee Contacts: <https://txmn.org/indiantrail/board-and-committees/>

Photo of Male mallard by Ian Kirk, courtesy of Wiki Commons

**READ MORE
ABOUT HOW TO
HELP MAKE SURE
THIS DOESN'T
HAPPEN!
RECYCLING TIPS
PAGE 17**

FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT...

By Erin McKool

Trailblazers,

At the time of my writing this in early September, we are experiencing a beautiful respite from the summer heat. I'm sure it won't last, but I'm confident you found ways to relish this time outdoors.

I'm proud to be a member of this chapter and inspired by all the ways that you contribute your time to nature. There's so much talent within this group! When our August speaker had to cancel, our own Robbie Robbins and Tabby Brobston stepped up and provided one of the most informative and entertaining presentations we've ever had, while also educating us about the Charles F. Ladd Nature Preserve. It's great hearing from our members about projects, such as Sue Frary with the Acoustic Bat Monitoring Project and Susan Vlach with Big Cedar. We plan to incorporate more of this in our meetings in the coming months, so you won't want to miss!

Our 2024 training class is in full swing, and I have enjoyed meeting our newest members at chapter meetings and events. Speaking of talent, one of the trainees, Donna Thomas, is already planning to submit a quilt to the Annual Meeting's art contest. The [Annual Meeting](#) is October 24-27 in San Marcos. I plan to attend if you have any questions.

Don't forget to check the Members' calendar for all the events coming up, including our regular workdays, fall wildflower walks, Plant Study Group, Bug Study Group, Nature Book Nerds Club, and many AT opportunities. You can sign up to volunteer for events on the website under our Members' section. And of course, whether you're tagging or not, we all have the privilege of witnessing the miraculous Monarch migration this fall. (Here's a photo of my inaugural tagging last October.)



I have so many things I want to mention to you! But in order to keep this brief, I'll remind you that I try to send a report out each month with details about our events and members. Please don't hesitate to reach out for a copy of any month's summary. I look forward to seeing you at our October meeting!

ESCAPE TO ESCARPMENT PRESERVATION AT BIG CEDAR WILDERNESS NEAR CEDAR HILL

By Ann Spencer

Driving through parts of our Dallas County neighbor Cedar Hill looks so much like parts of Austin, you start to wonder if maybe you took a wrong turn!

In a corridor of south Dallas County near Duncanville and Cedar Hill often called “the hill country of North Texas,” [Big Cedar Wilderness](#) is the 282.9-acre sister to escarpment preservation in the area that also includes Cedar Hill Preserve, Cedar Hill State Park and Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center.

Susan Vlatch, Big Cedar Wilderness Project Chair, at our August chapter meeting shared information about Big Cedar and about volunteer opportunities there the first Saturday of every month.

Brad Phillips, and his company Liberty Bankers Insurance Group, donated the property to the City of Dallas Parks and Recreation Department in a transfer through the Trust for Public Land. The property includes 175.2 acres of escarpment zone topography; 225+ acres of tree canopy; creeks, ponds, and wildflower meadows; and birdwatching rated 4.5 out of 5.0 on AllTrails.com.

Big Cedar Wilderness is an existing recreational amenity for Dallas, where the Dallas Off-Road Bicycle Association (DORBA) has developed and maintained 22 miles of trails and wayfinding signs. The trails are also used for running, birdwatching, and for faith-based activities at the adjacent Mountain Creek Church who helps steward the property. The church has invested in and maintained a large parking lot, trailhead, pavilion, playground, overlook, and restrooms.

Existing volunteer opportunities include first Saturday trail cleanups 7:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m. for trash cleanup, trimming and privet removal as well as training opportunities to lead, organize, or instruct educational hikes. Future volunteer opportunities are under development with Dallas Parks and Recreation.

Vehicle entry to Big Cedar is at Mountain Creek Church/Prayer Mountain, 5950 Eagle Ford Drive, Dallas, TX 75249. Patriot Pavilion, with running water and restrooms, is at 8701 Isom Lane, Dallas, TX 75219.

For more information on the preserve or volunteer opportunities, contact Susan Vlatch.

WILDERNESS WANDERINGS NEARBY

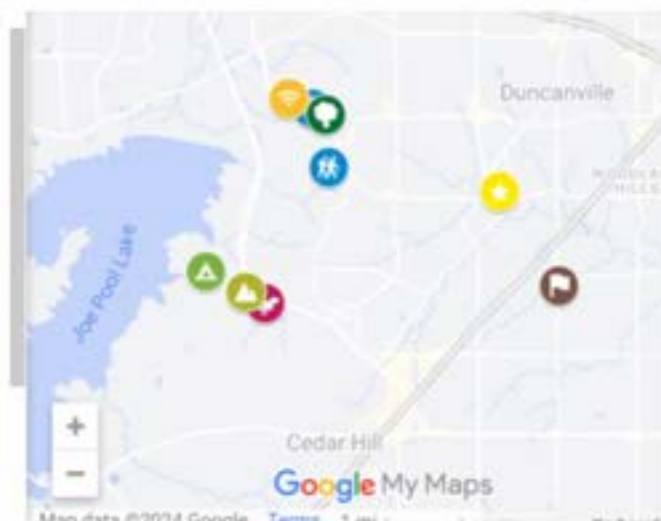
LOCATED IN SOUTHWEST DALLAS COUNTY—NEAR CEDAR HILL AND DUNCANVILLE

"IN A CORRIDOR OFTEN DESCRIBED AS THE NORTH TEXAS "HILL COUNTRY," WHICH INCLUDES CEDAR RIDGE PRESERVE, CEDAR HILL STATE PARK AND THE DOGWOOD CANYON AUDUBON CENTER."



Overview

- Cedar Hill State Park
- Charles F. Ladd Nature Preserve
- Prayer Mountain / Mountain Creek Commu...
- Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center
- Big Cedar MTB Trail
- Cedar Ridge Preserve
- Cedar Mountain - Dallas County Nature Pres...
- Windmill Hill - Dallas County Nature Preserve



Power Point slide courtesy Trust for Public Land



Photo of Antelope Horn Milkweed (*Asclepias asperula*) by Mark Graham

MR. WEST'S NEIGHBORHOOD

I was driving along the edge of the local swamp when I noticed a commotion in the brush. A Gulf Fritillary was flapping furiously, trying to escape a spider's web. Not one to interfere, I decided to let nature take its course. After some time and no spider, I assumed that the web was abandoned, so I thought I'd extricate the poor creature.

Before I could, a Pearl Crescent butterfly with poor eyesight seemed to think it had spotted a mating partner and so began trying to romance the beleaguered Fritillary. This went on for quite some time before the landlord, in the form of a funnel web spider, came out to see what the commotion was all about. The suitor took off and the Fritillary went dead still, instinctively, I suppose. The spider, not seeing anything and sensing nothing in its web, retired to the confines of its lair.* The Fritillary's coloring saved it, matching the dead leaves in the area.

I got the butterfly out and was about to shoot a couple of closeups of its wings before I released it when a larger Fritillary showed up. Attracted by pheromones, I guess, it flew around my hand for a while before taking off. Buh bye. JW

**Why do only predators (villains) have lairs? Why not dens or burrows?*

Not wanting to share the fate of this unfortunate one, our hero remained perfectly still in the face of its would be assassin. This Argiope picked a great spot for its web, right next to the Passion vine that Fritillaries lay their eggs on. This one looks like a recent hatchling.





FALL

TRAINING CLASS 2024

By Lynn Sawyer, ITMN Training Chair

Our fall training is off to a great start! Our classes are on Tuesday evenings from 6-9 p.m. We usually meet at the Family Life Center of First United Methodist Church, Waxahachie. All chapter members are welcome to attend and meet our trainees!

We do have a couple of off-site meetings, so please take a look at the schedule in advance if you'd like to join us. Chapter members can find all the details in the member calendar on our ITMN website.

This year, we have a class of 18 enthusiastic trainees – a group that includes professionals and volunteers in the fields of engineering, geology, aquarium design/maintenance, conservation educator, scientist, process analyst, managers, coordinators, office assistant, yoga teacher, homemaker, Airbnb and other business owners, long arm quilter, physician, accounting, radiologic technologist, photographer, and more!

Following is a snapshot of these newest members-in-training. Please join us in welcoming them!



Upcoming Presenters

- Sam Kieschnick,
Oct 8 at FUMC
- William Baule,
Oct 15 at FUMC
- Aaron Hoff,
Oct 22 at FUMC



Bob



Hannah



Kirk



Darius



Jacinda



Madeline



Debbie



Jasper



Mark



Donna



Kay



Michelle



Omar



Tammy



Sandy



Richard



Trish



Scott

Wild Geese at Night

By Jim Bush

The wild geese at night are
an unseen recurring theme
passing over each autumn
to call down a reminder of
the constant of change.

When I hear their plaintive cries,
I feel the mysterious ancient urge
and the faint pull of Earth's turning.
And it seems it would not take much
to overcome gravity's hold and go
to take my place in the wavering V
and join the journey south
as part of the living compass
of blood and feather.

Old Road

By Jim Bush

There is something about an old dirt road
long abandoned and regrowing wild
that is somehow so alluring.
The trees on either side rising up
to form an arbor, a welcoming
archway for the solitary walker.
How the animals use their travel
to hold the living margins back
just enough for need and no more.
And maybe that is it about abandoned
old roads —
the promise of regeneration, the reminder
of how Earth administates
her own green recovery plan.

YELLOW

is all the rage
this season.



Photos & layout by Jim West, yellow props courtesy of Spanish Gold *Grindella ciliata*

Fiery Skipper butterfly



Clouded Sulphur

Oblong-winged Katydid

Leafcutting bee



Green Lynx spider





YELLOW part deux,

Western Giant Swallowtail perusing the buffet.

Giant Bee fly



Long-tailed Skipper



Faithful Leafcutting bee



Phaon Crescentspot

THE SNAKE THAT CHANGED MY MIND



Photo by Joshua Freed

BY AMY ALLRED

“Not only will you learn to be comfortable around snakes, but one day you’re even going to call one ‘cute’.”

That's what I was told by a Master Naturalist just two years ago.

My response, according to that person...

“I will never call any snake ‘cute’.”

Growing up in the "burbs," I was rarely exposed to snakes. The only ones I recall were the relatively harmless and non-venomous "garden snakes" my dad found in his ever-expanding vegetable patch in the backyard (likely garter, ribbon, Dekay's brown, and rough earth snakes), all of which I observed from a "safe distance." There was also the curiously chimerical snake my imaginative 3-year-old brother supposedly found with long, black hair, purple eyes, wearing panty hose, carrying \$6, and headed to Six Flags. Unfortunately, this thrill-seeker of questionable accoutrements was likely enjoying the Mini Mine Train before I had a chance to look for it, so I'm unable to confirm or deny its existence.

Visiting my grandparents in rural Fayette County, about 200 miles south of Waxahachie, snakes were not so fanciful as my brother's find. Long before I learned about their importance, and the Free Snake Relocation Directory, or likely even before such a thing existed, I remember my grandfather telling about killing copperheads that sought shelter in a wood pile stacked away from the house while we were there.

That's when I came to really fear them, and that's where my education on them ended... until...

In the Spring of 2022, I was invited to go on a hike with Joshua Fread, a talented portrait photographer and Master Naturalist who enjoys photographing wildlife in his spare time - namely snakes. I was, as you can imagine, not as keen on the idea of finding any snakes, but his interest and enthusiasm in them was contagious and I enjoyed learning about them from him. Over time, as I continued to be exposed to his stories of snake encounters, how chill even venomous snakes can be when treated with regard and in a safe manner, and myths, that I had been taught, debunked, my fear began to slowly dissolve into a healthy respect for them, and even bloom into a fascination.

And then it happened.

One day, I saw an adorable photo of a snake Josh had taken and before I remembered his prediction, I said it... "It's so cute!"

Okay, so it's cute! That doesn't mean I'd be crazy enough to want one as a pet or anything, right? But then Amethyst Roney came to teach the herpetology section of the 2024 training for new members, which I've heard about four times, except this time I happened upon a photo shoot when she was wrangling an adventurous, non-venomous Trans-Pecos rat snake on the floor so that all of its body would fit into Josh's pictures.

I stood watching, mesmerized by how unbothered and easy-going it was as Amethyst gently corralled it over and over, nose to tail, into a "photogenic bundle." When the shoot was finished and she started to put it into its box, before I had a chance to think through what I was about to do or had a chance to back out, I asked if it would let me hold it. "Sure!" she said, as she handed it to me.

I had never held a snake on my own before, so I wasn't sure what to expect, but I was surprised at how this adorable little thing with a derpy face and googly eyes reminded me so much of a curious dog or a little kid as it explored up my arm, around my waist, stretching and telescoping a few inches from my face, flicking its tongue to investigate.

Something transformative happened in that moment, and my heart was utterly melted... by a snake. Hmm, maybe getting a pet snake wouldn't be so crazy after all.



Photo by Tabby Brobston

For help relocating a snake, go to the [Free Snake Relocation Directory](#) on Facebook or for local relocations, contact Miracle Bennett at 214.763.1857.



HEY, MOM! WHERE'S THE KLEENEX?!



Article and photos by Chris Cook

Back in the late '40s/early '50s (be careful, I can "hear" your comments...), our family would drive from Cincinnati, Ohio (yep, a born Yankee!) to Indianapolis to visit my aunt and uncle, and then go on up to Chicago to see the grandparents.

Yes, this was way prior to the interstate system, so we had our checkpoints of small towns and mom and pop sandwich shops. It was also way before air-conditioned cars, so trips in the autumn were not necessarily "see the beauty" drives, but instead became hours of misery. Being hot and muggy still in Indian Summer, the car windows were down; my carsick sister was crabby or asleep on Dramamine, and I hung out near the open window breeze with Kleenex stuffed up my nose. Lovely picture, right?

Sooooooo-welcome to hay fever season, the wealthiest time of the year for Zyrtek, Claritin, Benadryl, Sudafed, et al! For many hundreds of years and right now, the lovely yellow blooming goldenrod (*Solidago*, over 163 species), one of the last roadside and field weeds to bloom, can be seen along country roads and interstates all over the USA. It waves lovely in the fall breezes at the same timing of fall sneezes: ergo, goldenrod must be the culprit, right? Wrong, as science folks eventually surmised, but many of the public still have not. Here's why it's wrong: goldenrod pollen is too heavy and sticky to be wind carried to your nose or mine, and the wind is the carrier that brings misery to our noses.

So enjoy the goldenrod scenery, but keep your car windows closed and the Kleenex handy, because the real culprit is not so golden and, in my not so humble opinion, is way down on the pretty list! Ragweed is 'the enemy!' But get this, its scientific name seems so far removed from that - *Ambrosia*!! Really? Its conservation status is listed as Secure; big time secure, as in, I'm thinking it's sticking around forever!

All snarkiness aside for a bit, here's some of what I found out about the ragweeds. Some other names used for them include bitterweed, richweed, horse cane, buffalo weed, and wild hemp. They are considered native to the USA, but they have been introduced around the world.

There are several species of ragweed, but the ones found mostly in our area of Ellis County, TX are the common ragweed and the giant ragweed. The giant ragweed is quite obvious to all as it towers over most of the grasses and other plants nearby. One giant ragweed plant can produce about 5,500 seeds, while common ragweeds usually produce more than that. Both types will present competition with food and cotton crops and greatly lower the yield if allowed to remain.

Giant ragweed (*Ambrosia trifida*, Asterales) plants grow from 3-12 feet in height, although they have been measured up to 20+ feet. The stems and leaves are a bit rough and hairy. The leaves are mostly 3-5 lobed, toothed on the edges, usually opposite, and may be up to 12 inches long by 8 inches wide. The common ragweed plant (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) is a shorter 3+ feet in height with many deep leaf indentations.

The hayfever season begins in late summer/early autumn around the same time that the ragweed flowers begin to bloom. Although the ragweed plants have been growing since spring or early summer, it is the shortening of daylight that has occurred by August/ September that triggers the plants to bloom. This is also a time when there is less rain, but still breezes and drying out of plants, so that our late blooming ragweed can have its pollen spread straight to our noses. A single common ragweed plant can produce up to one billion grains that fly on the wind for hundreds of miles. Also noted is that increasing temperatures have upped this pollen production in recent years.

There is no doubt that ragweed is a potent allergen. It has also been called a “botanical villain”! Pulitzer Prize winning naturalist Edwin Way Teale, in his book, “Autumn Across America,” commented that “scientists estimate that more than three quarters of a million tons of ragweed pollen drift through the air above the USA each year. This living dust is carried miles upward into the sky. It is said to travel as far as 1000 miles from the plant that produces it.” Definitely a culprit!

But then, may not we all be, in some way? Therefore, not to be snarky and one-sided, the naturalist perspective sees the greater good for all nature, and ragweed is said to be a boon to wildlife in many ways. It produces copious amounts of seeds which are rich in many nutrients, seeds which remain available on or nearby the plant well into winter. The greens are a preferred browse for several animals and also offer somewhat safe habitat; surely the deer, turkeys, quail, mice, etc. take advantage of what ragweed has to offer them.

I learned a lot more about how ragweed was used medicinally in the past, about how it has a positive connection with tobacco fields, about medications to combat hayfever, etc., but you can google that as I have done. Right now, I have to run to see if I have a box of Kleenex in every room, duh!

Bug Study Group

Join us at 7 p.m. Friday, October 4 at the Waxahachie
Parks and Rec building, 401 South Elm Street.
Tabby Brobston will be teaching us about tarantulas!

FARMERS & PLANTS

UPDATE FROM TANNIS LAMBERT



Waxahachie Farmers Market

There have been some changes this season as the Waxahachie Farmer's Market is year-round except for January. Cheryl Michael and Lea Sandoz started rotating months to help me and Jerry McClung this summer and beyond!

The city started advertising our monthly crafts to local residents. We had our largest kid craft turnout at the September 7 market, so the ads and weather have had a positive impact. Special thanks for Lea's help in preparing the extra monarch butterfly craft and information booklet.

September 2023 - 34 visitors and 13 crafts

September 2024 - 39 visitors and 35 crafts

Jerry is attracting his own following with kiddos asking to see the man with the cool caterpillar/and butterfly shirt.



Jerry
McClung

PLANT FAMILY STUDY GROUP

We have studied many interesting plant Families this summer! Lea Sandoz started us off with Crassulaceae (sedums) where I happily discovered my mom has been growing several Sedum spectabile (ice plant) in pots around the house!

(PFSG continued)

Sue Frary shared a unique presentation on slime molds expanding our knowledge on this single celled 'blob.' Robbie Robbins and Tabby Brobston dove into the division Gnetophyta that includes Ephedraceae, Gnetaceae and Welwitschiaceae. There are eight Ephedra species native to Texas. Our September meeting covered Euphorbeaceae (spurge) presented by Eileen Berger.

PFSG meets at 7 p.m. monthly on the fourth Thursday at Waxahachie Parks & Rec. 401 S Elm Street.



Euphorbia bicolor by Robbie Robbins

Texas Youth Hunting Program

Most of us who grew up enjoying the wild outdoors also love sharing traditions that bring us closer to nature. Founded in 1996, the Texas Youth Hunting Program (TYHP) offers a unique opportunity to engage youth in the hunting heritage with safe, educational outdoor experiences. In this article, I'll explain how you can get youth involved, even if they've never hunted before.

In Texas, 93 percent of land is private. Most hunting requires annual leases, equipment, and a dedication that prohibits many from getting started. When I gave up my lease years ago, the challenge was to find ways for my loved ones to hunt in Texas. Day leases for bird hunts are available. But to hunt large game (deer or hog), single hunt leases are costly. Also, lease restrictions can stress one's time and hunt quality or limit flexibility in the camping experience.

Hunting public lands in Texas requires one to have routine access for scouting and to make special hunting setups for optimal success. One must consider a portable blind, tree stand, camping gear, and a lack of ease or proximity to hunt sites. Some Texas hunters do manage to hunt public lands, but the logistics needed to learn the hunt conditions and habitat are not ideal.

The good news is that TYHP offers many opportunities for youth to hunt big game without having to spend extraordinary time, resources, or finances. Participants gain access to private lands, game ranches, and wildlife management areas that are not granted to others. Landowners donate their land and access to wildlife or exotics to invite youth into the hunting heritage. As an adult sponsor you don't have to be a hunter or an outdoor fitness buff to support the hunt or the youth. TYHP hunts are accessible, informative, safe, and fun for everyone who attends.

Article and photos
by Thomas Hollingsworth



Thomas Hollingsworth (sponsor) and grandson, Sullivan Kelly (Youth Hunter) TYHP Hunt 2023/24.



Thomas Hollingsworth (sponsor) and grandson, Sullivan Kelly (Youth Hunter) TYHP Hunt 2023/24.



Here's how to get started:

1. Read up at: <https://tyhp.org/>. Like the Texas Master Naturalist program, TYHP is sponsored by Texas Parks and Wildlife.
2. Decide whether you or another adult has the ability to sponsor your youth's hunting event. The sponsor does need to be able to transport the youth, attend the hunt, and handle a camping arrangement (tent, camper, or primitive lodging). An experienced guide manages the entire hunt, so the sponsor is in an observer support role.
3. Get your loved one, or any youth, into a Hunters Education Program. Register at: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/hunter-education>. Attendance doesn't require a firearm.
4. Provide the youth with opportunities to safely operate a firearm. Most TYHP hunts require a rifle of .243 caliber minimum and a scope. A .243 is fine for most Texas hunts. Your youth must also build shooting proficiency at a range or with an experience shooter.
5. Register for hunts at <https://tyhp.org/youth-hunt-schedule/>. When you are ready, sign up for any and every hunt you and your youth can realistically attend. Why? Out of several thousand applicants, you can't predict which hunt for which your youth will be selected.

By applying for multiple events, you have the best chance of getting selected for one hunt. For the large game hunts between October and February, it is unlikely to be selected for more than one hunt. The cost is minimal, usually around \$200, which covers the administrative costs of the program and all the meals which are supplied (and are prepared and served by volunteers). Your youth may be able to borrow a rifle for the hunt; if needed, reach out to the event contact.

The value of this youth hunting program is immense. Each hunt is well managed by hunt masters, range masters, and other volunteers and is organized into small groups where each youth is assigned to a guide. The program is designed with the first-time youth hunter in mind, but many return for years before they age out of the program. As a sponsor, your job is mainly to help your youth adjust, share meals, share the experience, enjoy the outdoor adventure, spend time around a campfire, and join the educational programs that are part of each event.

If you have questions about how to get your youth involved in the hunting heritage or about how the Texas Youth Hunting Program works, contact me at tmhollingsworth@proton.me.

RECYCLING -- A Few Tips

By Sherry Mossbarger



Does recycling mystify you? Do you find yourself asking, "What do those symbols on my packaging mean? Where can I take certain items to be recycled?" and "Why can't I just put the whole pizza box in the green bin?"

Recycling is really quite simple these days. Most of the time one can find the familiar, universally recognized 'three chasing arrows folded in a Möbius strip' on most packaging. Sometimes, though, it can be a bit hard to find (why did they make it so tiny?) and it isn't always where you think it should be. I have also found items previously marked as recyclable that no longer have the symbol on them.

The following links explain what the numbers mean and what the items can become after recycling:

https://cdnimg.webstaurantstore.com/uploads/blog/2016/5/recycling_infographic.jpg

<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/ff/3e/47/ff3e479c4f9e5385b9c0e3df0e811f65.jpg>

(Please ignore the company name – the content is the important part.)

There are, however, a few things you can do to help the sorters at your local recycling center.

- Make sure ALL your items are clean and dry. Washing out that jar or can right after it is empty uses less water than trying to clean it after it the contents have dried. This will ensure pests and wildlife are not attracted to your recycled items.
- Straws can be recycled! They are a #5, so save your clear cup and lid from the fast-food place, bend your straw in half and insert the bent end into the straw slot on the top. When the cup is full, recycle the whole thing.
- Styrofoam DOES NOT BIODEGRADE! Save your Styrofoam to-go cups, egg cartons, meat trays, and formed packaging (look for the #6 symbol). The Dart Container Corporation at 850 Solon Rd, Waxahachie, TX 75165 has a small building to the left of the entrance where you can drop off your clean and dry Styrofoam. It is open day and night. They do not take the peanuts, however. You can drop them off at any UPS store if they are clean.
- Plastic grocery bags, cereal bags, bread bags, Ziploc brand baggies (check packaging on other brand names), dry-cleaner bags, and 6-pack rings (cut up, of course) can be bundled together and taken to Walmart or any other grocery store that takes #2 and #4 soft plastics. DO NOT PUT THESE OUT IN YOUR GREEN BIN FOR RECYCLING.
- About the pizza box... If the cardboard is clean and dry, please recycle it. However, if there are grease spots, please put it in the trash. While your local recycler accounts for some contamination from food, it is just better to cut away the contaminated parts.

- Electronics and computer chips need to be taken to a recycling center that takes them. If you have received a musical card, please take it apart and recycle the button battery and computer chip inside. Save up all your spent batteries (AA, AAA, C, D, rechargeable, and button) and take them to the Household Waste Recycling Event in your city.
- Glass, metal, and cardboard are three things that are always recyclable. If in doubt about what to place in your green bin, for example waxed milk cartons, please contact your local recycling center. Also, if you find it necessary to dispose of any type of plastic bag or wrap, be sure to tie it in a knot. This helps ensure it won't become airborne and end up as someone else's problem.

Remember – a bit of curiosity will help you reduce the amount of actual trash you put out for pickup and, consequently, the amount of money you spend on trash bags.

Armed with a couple of screwdrivers and a needle-nosed plier, I break down broken power washers, TV sets, radios, and whatever else might be put out for trash. This usually results in a pile of plastics, computer components and metals to recycle along with a satisfied sense of curiosity and a calmer mind (taking something apart is really therapeutic!)



Birding the Border

Article and photos by Rena Sutphin





Previous page: Northern Bobwhite. This page: above, Golden-Cheeked Warbler; top right, Black-Crested Titmouse; bottom right, Ladderback Woodpecker

Sue Frary and I had an indescribably wonderful experience with Texas AgriLife Birding the Border last spring. The program was held in Del Rio where we were escorted to several private birding ranches.

The funny part is that since Sue was registering for the "Photographer" group, I did, too. Now, I own a camera, but I am NOT what I would consider a photographer. I did, however, have a great time admiring the wealth of photography equipment that some people carry around with them everywhere and learning from some super photographers!

The photography group was a group of six and were escorted to each site by some real experts who had been scouting for some time, so they knew exactly what to look for and where. We were fed extremely well at most of the places, including dinner at Kickapoo State Park and lunch prepared by the owner of McKenna Ranch.

We were given some target species such as golden-cheeked warbler, black-capped vireo, Morelet's seedeater, black-tailed gnatcatcher, elf owl, and all three species of kingfisher that occur in North America. Our group was able to find some target species, but not all. Our group's favorite was the Golden-cheeked Warbler. Look for the Facebook page: Birding With Texas A&M Extension Service to see more of the trips offered each year.

Lantana and Honey Bees

Article and photos by Madeline Kelley

When I was a little girl... a long time ago... I so admired my mother's lantana earrings and necklace. I didn't know the plant then. Now, as an old woman, I get to see these beautiful plants on my morning walks in my neighborhood. I always have to stop and remember Mother and her jewelry.

On this particular summer day in 2024 (my mother has been gone for 30 years), I get to remember her again, but this time she has guests... honey bees! She would have attracted them... she was a sweet, kind, and gentle person.

The quotes are something to ponder as we look at the beauty around us.

"Do one thing every day that scares you."
-- Eleanor Roosevelt

"The only place success comes before work is in the dictionary." -- Winston Churchill

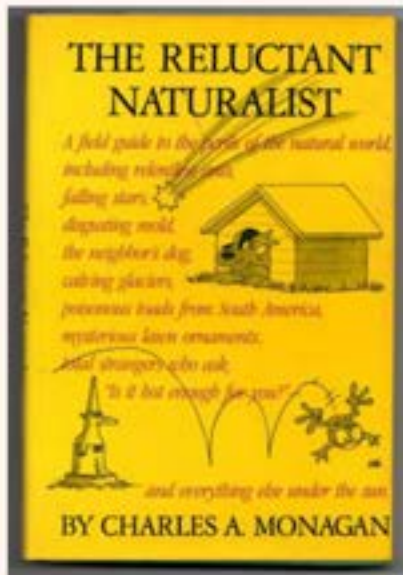
"An early morning walk is a blessing for the whole day." -- Henry David Thoreau

"If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one." -- Mother Teresa

"Keep your face in the sunshine and you cannot see a shadow." -- Helen Keller

"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world."
--John Muir





NATURAL

reads

THE RELUCTANT NATURALIST

An Unnatural Field Guide to the Natural World

by Charles A. Monagan

Atheneum, 1984

Book Review by Charlie Grindstaff

Confession: I am sure I purchased this book solely because it had "Naturalist" in the title. I could not/must not have read the book jacket before handing over my credit card.

The author states "Most field guides are designed for people who wish to pursue nature. This guide is for the far greater number of people who are convinced that nature is pursuing them." Hmmm? He does have a point, though, that nature programs on television always have dramatic music playing while the nature we typically encounter lacks the pipe organ and kettle drum.

Thinking that we may be as reluctant to go out into nature, he recommends that we begin our nature hike in our house with its many advantages... lack of rain, can be done in your pajamas, and no need to pack food or water. His "don'ts" include: don't go barefoot; don't light a campfire on your floor; and don't feed the wildlife. Huge spiders, mice, ants, monsters, silverfish, cockroaches, moths, and something (a purely aural phenomenon, as in, "Did you hear something?") are the typical wildlife in the house environment. He provides a description (usually amusing... moth is a low-budget butterfly), habitat (monsters almost always lurking under beds), habit (mouse likes to party after the sun goes down), food, and comments.

He recommends you advance to the yard (yours or your neighbors) or the city park. Short hikes in familiar spaces, close to a phone, at a brisk pace so that only the benign surface aspects of nature are glimpsed. Never stray far enough away from home so that you can't run back without being out of breath. Essentials to carry along include bug spray, walking stick (recommends a 3-iron golf club), knife, and folding chair. Just in case you come upon a beautiful sunset, you will want to be seated comfortably. Wildlife you may encounter includes June bugs, gnats, mosquitoes, the neighbor's dog, praying mantids, yellow jackets, bats (just harmless mammals who wish they were birds), fireflies (what do they eat? Odd bits of peanut butter, mayonnaise, jelly – whatever kind of jar it ends up in, of course) and birds.

Eventually he gets to the deep woods, ever so reluctantly. And much like the previous excursions, his hints and tips are chuckle worthy but ridiculous... except when filling your backpack, you should bring a drink; but beer and wine will get warm; so, stick to red wines and Scotch. Don't wear a deer-colored jacket during deer hunting season and if you become trapped in quicksand, lay flat and yell: "Here Lassie! And bring some rope, girl!!!"

Watch out for the wildlife: rattlesnakes, fire ants, Bigfoot, bears, deer, wolves, and hunters. He does encourage sketching what you see in nature and journaling. I admit this was my least favorite chapter in the book. His entry for May 29 was right on target, though... "just when it gets hot enough outside so that you need nice shady spots, the trees grow leaves and provide nice shady spots. This is nature at its best."

He ends the book with descriptions of some places around the world to find nature. And since I will be travelling to Alaska soon, I should not have read his description:

"Terrain: Huge, white, and very cold. Climate: Like the inside of a refrigerator, except without anything good to eat. Natural Danger: Hypothermia, dogsled mutinies, polar bears, and snow blindness, preceded by snow nearsightedness. Natural Oddities: Sunshine at midnight; darkness at noon; all animals are white or wish they were; gigantic crabs; few leaves to rake; no monkeys."

Luckily it is a short book of only 111 pages, so I didn't waste too much of my time reading it.



Photo of Southern Leopard Frog (*Lithobates sphenoccephalus*) by Mark Graham