



INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

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

FALL 2025



INDIAN TRAIL MASTER NATURALIST NEWSLETTER TEAM

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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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For ITMN Members Only:

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

Correction: A photo at the top of page 13 in the 2025 Summer edition on the Bluebonnet Festival had an identification error. At far right, in hat and sunglasses, is Tannis Lambert.

Congratulations to Matt Bacon, new AT Coordinator for the chapter. For questions or for pre-approval for Advanced Training, contact Matt at AT@itmntx.org. Many thanks go out to Lynn Wisakowsky for her years of service in this role!

Also note that Ann Spencer will serve as interim newsletter chair through December 2025 due to the absence of Chair Melanie Gibson. The newsletter team would like to thank Melanie for her dedication to the newsletter production.

FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

Trailblazers,

Happy 15-Year Anniversary! As we approached our September celebration, I was looking forward to reminiscing about our history as a chapter and hearing stories from members who paved the way for ITMN. This is also a time to celebrate the milestones that members continue to mark today through various outreach projects and events.

Long-standing and newer members continue to be engaged side by side, as reflected in the fact that both Charlie Grindstaff (2010) and Sherry Mossbarger (2021) will be presenting at the Annual Meeting in October. It's exciting to cheer them on and to support the members who have submitted entries into the Annual Meeting contests. There will certainly be stories for them to share with us at our October chapter meeting!

If you have not met the members of our fall training class, please consider visiting a Tuesday evening class and getting to know this dynamic group of lifelong learners. Classes will continue through October 28.

If you are new to the chapter, this is an exciting time to plug in. Please take a look online at the Members' calendar to review all of our upcoming events. As always, do not hesitate to reach out with any questions. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Erin McKool



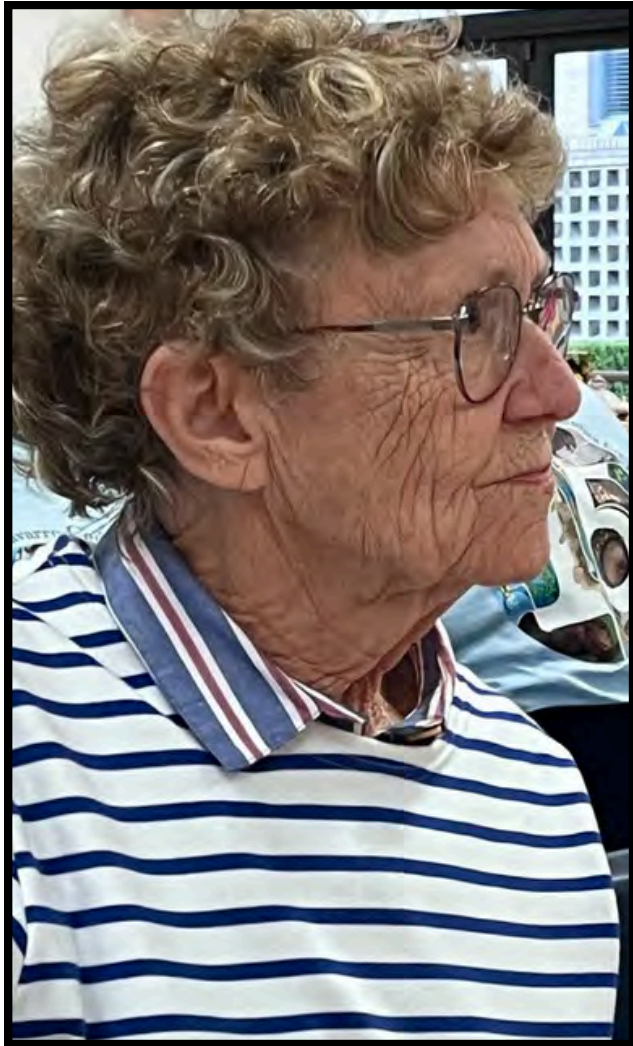
NOW AND THEN: 2010–2025

ITMN celebrated 15 years at the September 22, 2025 chapter meeting. At left, chapter founder Linda Moxley gets greetings from President Erin McKool.

Read more about the chapter founding and the anniversary party on pages 4-8.

Photo by Ann Spencer

Our story: The mastery of making naturalists in an agricultural county



L.S. "Mox" Moxley; Photo by Ann Spencer

Early steps in forging Indian Trail Master Naturalist chapter

By Linda Moxley (condensed version)

Linda S. "Mox" Moxley loves nature, works to sustain it and shares her knowledge and its joys with others. As she approached retirement as a university research and planning administrator, she purchased several tracts of heavily wooded property in Waxahachie, Texas. The ability to attract and observe the rural wildlife and to enhance their habitat was a dream unfolding for her.

However, to maintain the relatively lower agricultural tax evaluation for the property, she found it necessary to pursue agricultural related activities. As a result, for 10 years she bred and sold miniature goats and donkeys. Her farming and property development approaches reflected her environmental concerns. The land was cross-fenced to permit the rotation of animal pasture grazing, and un-grazed portions were planted with trees, shrubs, flowers and forbes to attract bees, butterflies, birds and other wildlife. *(continued on next page)*

Here is an outline of steps that led to the formation on the ITMN chapter:

Late 1990s: Mox converts her property to Texas Wildlife Management for ag exemption, consulting with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) website to develop qualifying wildlife management activities, and encouraging her friends and neighbors to do the same. She hosted children for fishing contests on her pond, using TPWD educational information.

Early 2000s: Mox trains and gets certified with Ellis County Master Gardeners and meets others there who have a broader interest in nature at large.

2005: Mox discovers the state had developed the Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) program in 1998; she begins talking to her gardener friends and also the county ag office about starting an Ellis County TMN chapter. She begins working toward that goal while undergoing training and certification through the neighboring Rio Brazos TMN chapter along with four others in 2008. She continues working with the Ellis County ag office about starting an Ellis County TMN chapter. Ellis Co Extension Agent Mark Arnold agrees to work with the group if they can demonstrate enough interest in a county chapter. Jeff Powell, Ellis County game warden and the only TPWD staff member in the county, promptly drafts a support letter indicating his willingness to serve as a secondary advisor. The volunteer team gets dedicated space at the county extension office.

2008: The Ellis County Master Gardener's Lawn and Garden Expo features an information booth on TMN and chapter planning members begin meeting at First United Methodist Church Waxahachie. *(continued on next page)*

Class of 2010 members attending the anniversary party included (from left: Danny Smith, Aaron Gritzmaker, Charlie Grindstaff, Paul Grindstaff, Lysle Mockler, Dan Rayfield, Deborah Rayfield, Maureen Nitkowski, Carolyn Gritzmaker, Linda "Mox" Moxley, Carolyn Ross, and Eileen Berger.

Photo by Ann Spencer



(continued on next page)

Mox chaired team meetings, prepared the agendas, drafted minutes, training schedules, prospective member communications, the Texas Master Naturalist Chapter application form, and other required documents. All were reviewed and modified as needed by the planning team. Numerous chapter names were considered that reflected such characteristics as the County's geographic location (Blackland Prairie) or the abundance of spring bluebonnets, the State flower; but, the name **Indian Trail Master Naturalist chapter** gained consensus because various Indian tribes originally camped or hunted in the area and the title would prompt flashback to the county's original natural environment. The State association provided a limited number of logos from which to choose as the chapter's unique symbol. The planning team selected the **prickly pear cactus** because of its prevalence in the area and its multiple uses by Native Americans.

Once the proposed training schedule and speakers had been approved by the planning committee, Mox began contacting speakers and coordinating the field trip opportunities. Participant recruitment presentations were made to the County Master Gardeners and other nonprofit agencies; fliers, posters, and bookmarks were distributed to banks, libraries, and various governmental and non-governmental offices; and members of the local bird watchers' association and Ducks Unlimited were contacted.

For the first year, the class size was restricted to 20 applicants. The group would be large enough to sustain the organization, given the prospect of some withdrawals, and it would not be too large to stifle field trip learning. The marketing campaign was successful. The number of applicants exceeded the openings. Applicants who appeared to have conflicting or significant existing commitments were asked to participate the following year. Class members were diverse -- ranging from a minister, a nurse, a legal secretary and financial manager to homemaker, volunteer meteorologist/bird watcher, a wildflower enthusiast, wildlife rehabilitator, arborist, and school teachers.

2010-11: The chapter is official with a slate of officers and committee leaders!



We Remember:

ITMN members who have passed on to greener pastures include (from top left) Gerald VanZandt (2010) 6/30/2024; DeBee Arnold (2011) 1/4/2017; Elderbob Brannan (2011) 4/23/2012; Jon Reuscher (2011) 8/18/2012; Sara Cornett (2013) 9/21/2018; Don Mitchell (2013) 9/21/2023; Gayle King (2015) 6/30/2022; Joan Mahoney (2016) 9/02/2023; Lois Lyon (2016) 8/23/2021; Steve Hill (2018) 5/27/2020; John Moltz (2023) 2/15/2025.

Photo by Ann Spencer

Party Pics #15 anniversary 9/22/25



Top Left: Lysle Mockler reunites with Deborah Rayfield; bottom left: Hospitality team and early arrival helpers are from left Sandy Ashbrook, Celia Yowell, Christine Cook, Maegan Bacon, Donna Thomas, and Trish Gifford.

Top Right: Amy Allred cuts the cake.

Photos by Erin McKool, Ann Spencer

Hi Trailblazers!
Writing on behalf of all who helped
establish the ITMN Chapter and
participated in the initial class,
we had a fabulous time at the
anniversary celebration! Fun, food
and fellowship just like 15 years
ago! (Our type of work is fun!)

Many of us became Master
Naturalist after retirement as
"seniors," and yet, we plan to attend
the 25th Anniversary. Why not?
Research shows that exercise and
being outdoors can keep you going!
So, we hope to see you then....if not
before!

Keep the home fires burning,
Trailblazers!
Love,
Mox

Linda Sanford: Favorites--new
friendships with awesome people
doing great things! Plus Kachina
Prairie, Ennis library, John Bunker
Sands Wetland Center, Veteran's
Village, Citizen's Science, Christmas
parties, Summer parties at Rena's,
Citizen's Science...and everything
else! Thanks to all of you for all that
you do!

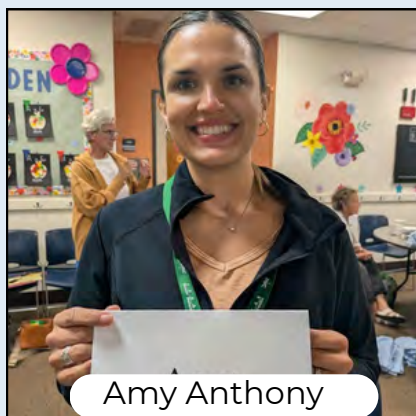
Madeline Kelley-Schwoch: I like a
quote that comes up when I send
an email. See the Native
American quote below:

"When the last tree has been cut
down, the last fish caught, the
last river poisoned, only then will
we realize we cannot eat money"
- Native American proverb

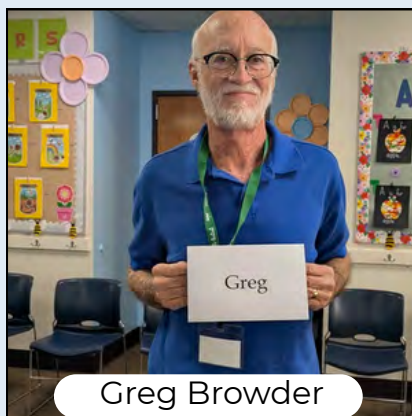


Check out the [ITMN 15-year anniversary video](#)
by Robbie Robbins on YouTube!

WELCOME TO THE FALL 2025
INDIAN TRAIL MASTER NATURALIST



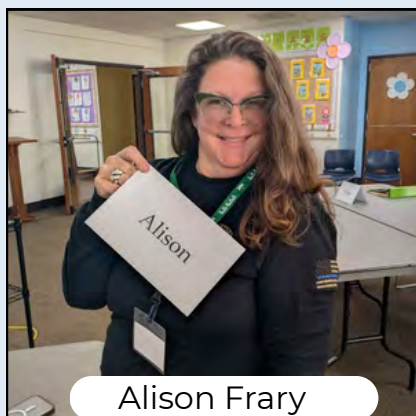
Amy Anthony



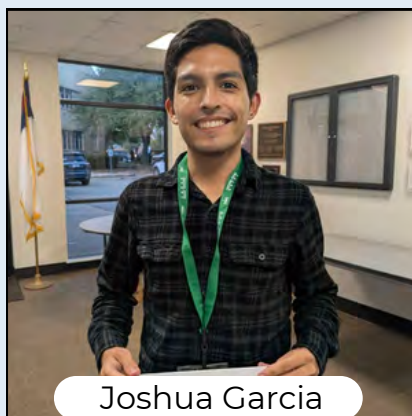
Greg Browder



Ashleigh Bugg



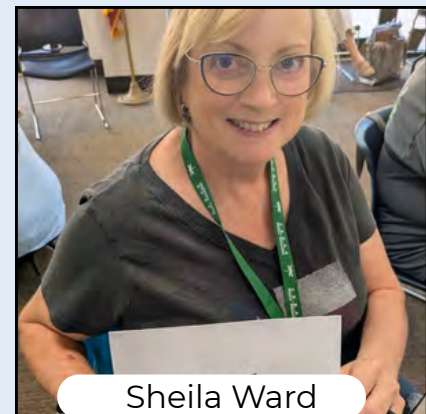
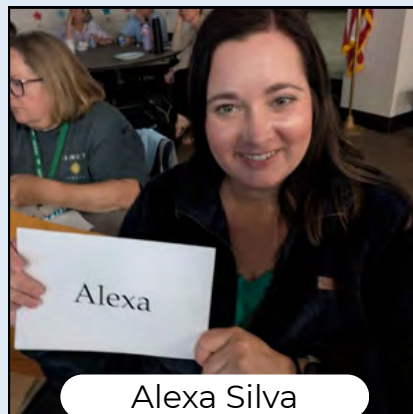
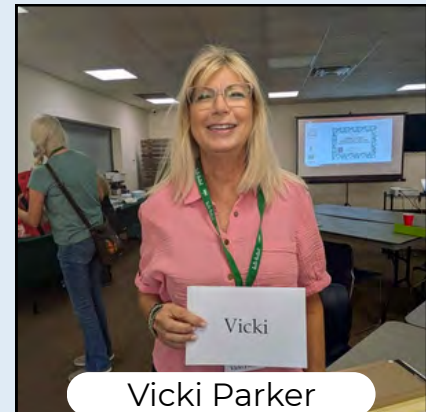
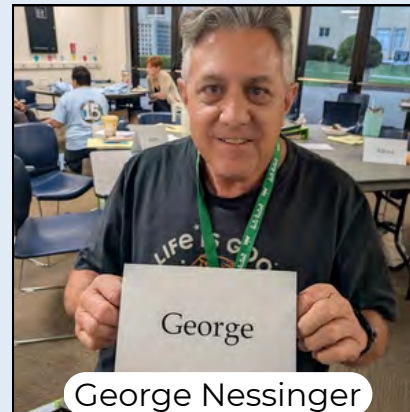
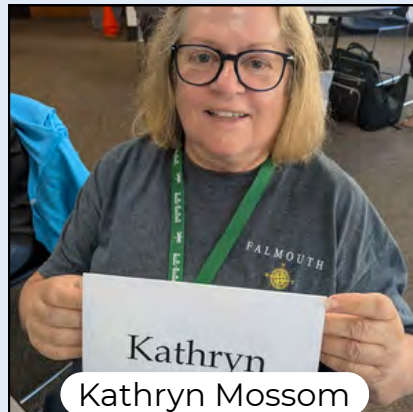
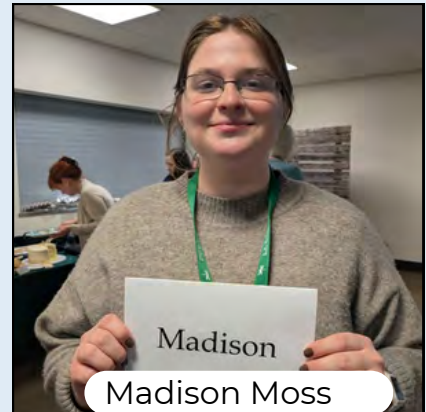
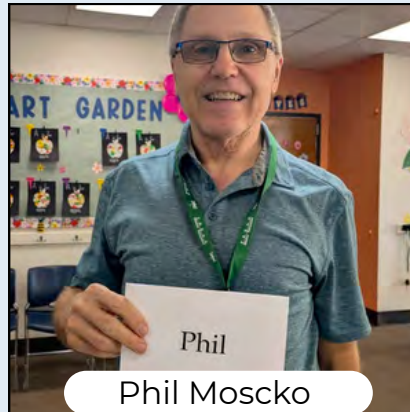
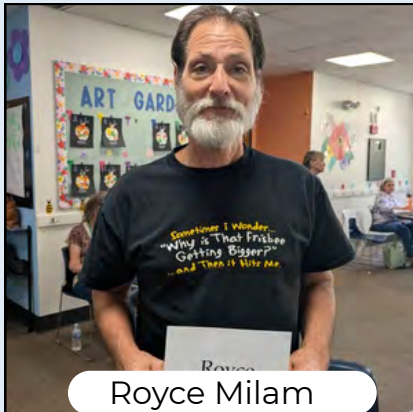
Alison Frary



Joshua Garcia



Teresa Grosboll



Fall 2025 Training Update

By Lynn Sawyer, ITMN Training Chair

Our Fall Training Class is off to a great start! Classes are on Tuesday evenings from 6-9 PM at the Family Life Center of First United Methodist Church, Waxahachie. All chapter members are welcome to attend the classes with our last class being October 28!

This year, we have a class of 18 diverse individuals with varied backgrounds ranging from teachers, computer programmers, entrepreneurs, and more. These members-in-training are coming to class each week and working together on Chapter volunteer projects with a vision of reaching the goals and objectives of the Master Naturalist Program.

Come on out and join our Tuesday night classes and meet this incredible group of students!

Moon over Mockingbird Nature Park



Text and photos by
Meagan Bacon

At the September 27 Moon Night at Midlothian Mockingbird Nature Park, we had 12 adults and 17 kids visit. Everyone seemed to enjoy the craft and the telescope.

We were able to view the moon's craters and see the rings of Saturn. One family did ask if we would do a guided night walk next year. I think that would be a fun idea.



OH, DO YOU
KNOW THE
BUTCHER
BIRD?!



Photo by Sam Kieschinick, courtesy iNaturalist

Loggerhead Shrikes are a crafty bunch

By Melissa Lynch

If asked to compose a list of qualities that come to mind when thinking of songbirds, would the word “brutal” make that list? If not, let me introduce you to the Loggerhead Shrike. Comparable in size to a robin, these passerines, which are year-round residents of Texas, have earned themselves the ominous nickname - the Butcherbird.

The Loggerhead Shrike prefers habitats of open grassland, with scattered trees and shrubbery. Much like some raptors, they hunt by perching high - atop trees, utility poles, or fence posts - where they will watch for prey in the form of insects, reptiles, small mammals, or even other birds. While an insect might provide a quick and fairly easy meal for the Loggerhead Shrike, larger selected prey can be much more of a challenge. This is where they get crafty. *(continued on next page)*

Although Loggerhead Shrikes hunt in raptor-style, their bodies are not equipped the same as a raptor. While they do possess a hooked beak with a tomial tooth, similar to that of a falcon, their feet are a different story. They are passerines, also known as perching birds. All passerines possess three forward facing toes, and one backward facing toe, prime for grasping branches. They lack the talons that a raptor would use to capture, carry, and kill its prey.

Instead, one method the Loggerhead Shrike employs is utilizing its hooked beak to grab its prey by the nape of the neck, and performing a series of rapid, long-axis head rolls, potentially causing paralysis or death. In this manner, they can effectively use the inertia of especially large prey's own body against them (Sustaita et al.).

Another fascinating method utilized by the Loggerhead Shrike is the behavior that warrants the nickname "Butcherbird." After the catch is made, the Loggerhead Shrike will transport its prey to a nearby sharp object, where it will impale its meal. Loggerhead Shrikes use thorns, sharp sticks or leaves, or when a natural source is not available, have even been known to use barbed wire to impale and hold their prey. Impaling the prey not only stabilizes it, essentially anchoring it down while the Shrike eats from it, it can also serve as a supply cache of food, stored upon the chosen piercing object for future consumption.

Though their predatory practices can often take a gruesome form, these beautiful songbirds are a sight to see. While it is possible to see them in our region year-round, as the summer months come to an end, that possibility only rises.

Sighting Tip: Pay attention to open grasslands containing hedgerows, lines of trees, scattered trees or shrubs, or any elevated perch the Loggerhead Shrike can use for sight advantage. Keeping in mind the behavior of impaling, areas with locust trees, mesquite trees, and barbed wire fences are also a good place to start.

Work Cited

Sustaita, Diego, et al. "Come on baby, let's do the twist: the kinematics of killing in loggerhead shrikes." *Biology Letters*, vol. 14, no. 9, 2018, -. Royal Society Publishing, <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsbl.2018.0321>. Accessed 10 09 2025.

Project Updates: Plants, Farmers, NaviLens

Text and photos by Tannis Lambert

Plant Family Study Group

- July - Presented art collection winners from Curious Allies Mutualism in Fungi, Parasites, and Carnivores from the [American Society of Botanical Artists](#). This was a fun way to see plants that are unusual and learn about their relationships with other organisms.
- August - The Invasive Giant Salvinia plant and what to know about it was presented. This was followed by the Salvinia Weevil for the Bug Study Group and how it is used as a management tool in Texas and around the world.
- September – Charlie Grindstaff reviewed plant basics.
- October- No meeting as it is the state convention.
- November – The Cucurbitaceae Family (squashes) will be presented by Chris Cook and Celia Yowell.

Waxahachie Farmer's Market

- July – Debbie Woolard joined Cheryl Michael and Tannis Lambert for RWB Dragonflies. 27 adult guests visited our booth with a couple interested in the upcoming classes! We enjoyed making dragonflies with 22 children. Debbie met us here last year at the Farmer's market and is already involved!
- August- Nature Journal crafts were made. Jerry McClung, Cheryl Michael, and Lea Sandoz talked with 35 people! They made 16 journals with the children.
- September- Jerry McClung, Cheryl Michael, Lea Sandoz, and Tannis Lambert talked with 45 adult visitors and made 28 monarch rings! We also handed each family an educational booklet about monarchs and milkweed plants. Visit us on the first Saturday of every month at the Waxahachie Farmer's Market. *(continued on next page)*



Left: Waxahachie Farmers Market volunteers Cheryl Michael and Debbie Woolard; right: Cheryl crafting.

The NaviLens Project Has Come a Long Way!

NaviLens is a company dedicated to “empowering blind and partly sighted people.” They are based in Spain, but their [special QR codes help people worldwide](#) in 39 languages.

Our funding monies were released from Midlothian Community Development Corporation (MCDC) and Sherry Mossbarger and Tannis Lambert jumped right into assembling signage for 40 QR codes. Sherry worked closely with the NaviLens organization to learn how to input all the information. We worked to put plant descriptions together and into the NaviLens QR system.

NaviLens launched during the last Spring Wildflower Walk on June 21 at Midlothian Nature Park. Members from MCDC were present and excited to see the way the signs were set up. After that we started checking the signage weekly and tweaking things as we learned more. Soon we added photos along with the plant descriptions adding to the ability for the app to be a self-guided walk when we are not present at the park! Scott Bourgeois joined our team and started checking the trail signage, taking new photos, mapping, and giving helpful suggestions.

Sherry and Tannis then turned their focus to preparing for the state project contest. We held a mock visit day with several Indian Trail members to work with the city of Midlothian to create a video to be used during the project contest presentation and for the city to share the NaviLens project. Somehow, we managed to compile all the information and Sherry presented the project live during the TMN Tuesday on September 9. She did a fabulous job! The results will be announced at the State Convention in October. Sherry will also be a presenter for this project at the convention! Sherry and Tannis would like to thank all of the Indian Trail members that helped along the way with so many different things!

At top: Sherry Mossbarger coordinating with NaviLens;
middle: Sherry and Tannis Lambert working on signs;
bottom: Eileen Berger leading nature walk with NaviLens.



Galveston, oh, Galveston, I still hear your sea winds blowin'...

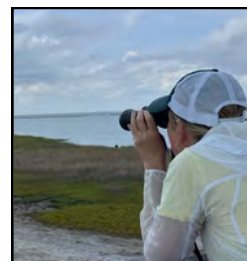
Don't underestimate Galveston!



Text and photos by Erin McKool

It took me 25 years of living in Dallas to finally make my first trip to the Texas seashore. Why so long? Because of all the naysayers! Every time I would mention making a drive down to Galveston, all I would hear was how ugly the coastline is, how dirty the water is, how unappealing the town is and of course the kicker: how it's a great place to pick up flesh-eating bacteria.

Still, my mom and I decided we and our dogs needed a last-minute Labor Day vacation and we invited our friend from Tennessee to join us. Since it was booked last minute, there was no changing our minds, despite final warnings from friends about heat, humidity, brown water, and mosquitoes -- descriptions that horrified my son and husband who decided to stay home. Undaunted, off we went. With a clear I-45 path from Dallas to Galveston, we arrived in under five hours. Based on about eight minutes of internet research, we chose a tiny but perfect rental house in Pirate's Beach, which is about 20 minutes west of central Galveston, and very near Galveston Island State Park. *(continued on next page)*



From left: Fellow naturalist loans binoculars; Erin and mom Lynnete Orten on the beach; bird watching at Galveston State Park.

At our first beach sighting, we were ecstatic -- the water was clear, the skies were blue and the sand looked very much like that of our birthplace, northern California. We immediately decided the naysayers must not be true “beach people,” because what’s not to love?! (To be fair, we learned later that the water was unusually clear and blue this summer.)

We unpacked the car and let ourselves breathe in the salty, warm, humid, and altogether fine summer weather. We spent the next three days swimming in the ocean, running in the sand with the dogs, eating delicious seafood, walking (and slipping) in the rain, visiting the state park, meeting fellow travelers and naturalists, and gaining a deeper appreciation for this diverse and beautiful state we call home.



Pickleweed



Yellow-Crowned Night Heron

Autumn Glory

By Jim Bush

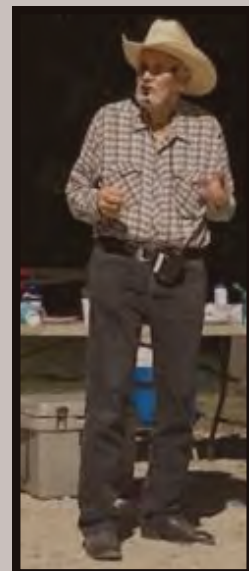
**Chlorophyll has left the leaves,
the hidden glory now revealed.
The bright colors have been waiting –
orange, red, gold and yellow –
magnificent scarlet of the black gum
showing first and daring the others
to try and match its early brilliance.
The sugar maples will meet the challenge,
Virginia creeper following with multicolored
climbing brilliance and the hickories
transforming green summer forest into
wave upon wave of peaceful yellow.
Autumn is nature's coat of many colors
and the mellow song of summer's end.**



Mike Harrison



Text and photos by Charlie Grandstaff



David Smith

Poet "Lariat" David Smith and Guitarist Mike Harrison provided sensational entertainment at Kachina Prairie for the 45-50 attendees. Additionally, the Moon and Saturn provided a dazzling show for those who took advantage of the telescope view.

Attendees were split into teams of five, given eight minutes to write a poem using these four words: spur(s), hand(s), cactus, and moon. Team 3 (Ashleigh, Sharon, Eric, Sandy & Madeline) won with their poem:

A cowboy was riding
By the light of the moon
His hands were tired
He wanted to get home soon.
He spurred the horse to make it go fast
But his grip on the reins did not last
He needed much more practice
As he fell into the prickly pear cactus.

But, Nellie, a young girl from Team 4 absolutely stole the show when SHE SANG THEIR POEM!

My spurs were spinning 'cause I was running
The curs they'd attack us
I ran past the cactus
Under the moon
They'd be catching us soon.
I fell to the ground, my hand
Felt through the sand.

Many thanks to Jim Patak for organizing this event, which we unanimously voted to hold again next year. Many thanks to the members who provided the yummy cookies and hot cocoa. And special thanks to Ennis Parks for providing the port-a-potty. *(continued on next page)*

MORE COWBOY RHYMES AND RHYTHMS...

We took a hike to see the moon
We tripped over the cactus and
busted my moon
So you know you're a cowboy
when you use your hand
To wave your spur at the moon.

Mary, Tannis, Linda, Greg, Phil

Desert night watches
the cactus
like silver spurs
The moon is at hand.

Debbie, Kathryn, Domenic, Jack

On a moonlight night
The lonesome cowhand
Set out on a ride
While he was gazing at the
moon,
He spurred his horse a little
too hard
And in the cactus he got
thrown.

Ginger, Richard, Celia,
Chris, Linda

In Moonlight spurs shine
A cowboy's hand hits cactus
"Yee ouch!" he cries out!

Art and poetry: Justice, Jubilee,
Maegan, Courage, Liberty

