

# INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

Feb./Mar. 2016

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

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## From the Desk of the **PRESIDENT**

*Charlie Grindstaff, President ITMN*

My apologies everyone. I willfully chose to ignore one of the presidential duties listed in the Chapter Operating Handbook. I was supposed to present a summary of the Chapter's accomplishments at our first general meeting of the new year. I looked at the large number of items on the agenda and decided looking backwards to the accomplishments you already know about & helped complete was less important than looking forward to what we want to accomplish next and getting our leadership in place. So what did we accomplish...a lot!

We built a whole lot of bluebird nest boxes; had a very successful EXPO, both the main booth with insect hotels going like hotcakes and children making native bee dwellings; the pond at Mockingbird filled up (okay, we can't take credit for that, but we did put the depth gauge in last year so when it did fill this year we could know how deep the water was); we cheered Mother Nature even as we cancelled event after event last spring because of rain; went on awesome field trips to Chaetura Canyon, the George Bush Presidential Library Texas Native Park, and Waste Management's Skyline Landfill; hosted a LANDS Volunteer Training Workshop with attendees from 3 other chapters; organized a Plant Family Study Group; held our second chapter Retreat; led activities for kids at the Waxahachie Farmer's Market twice; taught nature classes at Paws For Reflection Day Camp; hosted the Grapevine Garden Club for tours of Mockingbird Nature Park and members' wildscapes; participated in the Heroes of Midlothian, Midway Airport Fly-In and the Ferris Earth Day events; led walks at Kachina Prairie as part of the Ennis Bluebonnet Festival; decorated a Christmas window in Ennis; and built a raptor enclosure.

See, if I had chosen to present this summary at our meeting, we would have been there until midnight.

And I created this list from the top of my head without looking back at my calendar so I am sure I forgot some important accomplishments like getting on board with VMS training and the awesome training class of 2015. Any omissions are purely unintentional. So my summary is: We had a very busy, very successful year. I thank you all for your dedication, for your good hearts and willing hands. You inspire me.



*This yet to be named Barred Owl is the first resident of the Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center Raptor enclosure. See more inside.*

# Events, Projects, Meetings & Volunteer Opportunities

## FEBRUARY

- 12-15 **Great Backyard Bird Count**  
<http://gbbc.birdcount.org/> for details
- 13 Feather Fest at Acton Nature Center 10 am  
Rio Brazos Chapter; GBBC
- 20 **Kachina Prairie Workday**
- 22 ITMN Meeting 6 pm, with Program at 7pm --  
Eileen Berger presents "Science of Archeology"
- 26 **Kachina Prairie Workday**
- 26 **LANDS Field Investigation Days at**  
**Bear Creek Ranch, Aledo**
- 27 **Mockingbird Nature Park "Mayor's Winter Walk"**  
**10 am**
- 27 **Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center**  
**4th Sat. Workday**

## MARCH

- 3 **Plant Family Study Group, 6:30pm –**  
**Location TBD**
- 5 **BRIT work day**
- 8 **LANDS Field Investigation Days at Bear**  
**Creek Ranch, Aledo**
- 11 **LANDS Field Investigation Days at Bear**  
**Creek Ranch, Aledo**
- 17 **Plant Family Study Group, 6:30pm –**  
**Location TBD**
- 19 **Lawn & Garden Expo, Waxahachie**
- 19 **Mockingbird Nature Park Wildlife Walk**
- 19 **Kachina Prairie Workday**
- 23 **LANDS Field Investigation Days at Bear**  
**Creek Ranch, Aledo**
- 28 **ITMN Chapter Meeting and 5th Anniversary**  
**Celebration – details TBA**
- 30 **LANDS Field Investigation Days at Richland**
- 31 **LANDS Field Investigation Days at Richland**

## What's The BUZZ!

Native Buzz is the newest Citizen Science volunteer program approved by our chapter at

the Jan. 11, 2016 Board Meeting. Created by the University of Florida's Honey Bee Research and Extension Lab, the goal of the Native Buzz program is to learn more about the nesting preferences, diversity and distribution of our native solitary bees and wasps. Volunteers are asked to register at the Native Buzz website

(<http://entomology.ifas.ufl.edu/ellis/nativebuzz/>), provide a nest site for solitary bees and wasps, monitor and report data. Their website has complete instructions, including links to DIY nest building plans and tips on installing nest blocks, links to ID guides, and an interactive "Buzz Map" where you'll find data reported around the world.

Using the data collected by volunteers, the Honey Bee Research and Extension Lab will monitor the populations, regional distribution and diversities of solitary bees and wasps. This research will also help them track introduced non-native or invasive species. Don't forget the kids and grandkids when signing up! Native Buzz provides students of all ages an opportunity for hands-on learning about these important pollinators.



ITMN member Carolyn Gritzmaker, who proposed our chapter participate in the Native Buzz program, installed two nesting boxes shown here. Contact Carolyn ([c.gritzmaker@gmail.com](mailto:c.gritzmaker@gmail.com)) if you'd like to know more about her nest site and where she purchased materials.

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# AWARDS

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We're so proud of our chapter and their achievements in volunteer service. Between November 2015-January 2016, the following individuals were recognized:



Certification – Anne Marie Gross



Recertification –  
Catherine Collins, Judy  
Melby, Rex Reeves,  
Travis Edwards, Rebecca  
Schumacher.



Jean Kastanek, Muffi Ruby (Not  
pictured: Karen Lawton, Dawn  
Wheeler)



Not pictured: 1,000  
Hour Pin – Jack  
Dunaway

500 Hour Pins – Michaela Kral, Don Happ, Rebecca Schumacher

2,500 Hour Pin – Paul Grindstaff



250 Hour Pins – Celia Yowell (Not pictured: Bob Cochran, Jean Kastanek)

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# 2015 CLASS OF

Congratulations to the 15 graduates of ITMN fall training program! Graduates completed 40 hours of combined field and classroom training to learn more about the biological and physical environment that makes our Blackland Prairie unique. With presentations from Texas Parks & Wildlife, John Bunker Sands Wetlands Center, Botanical Research

Institute of Texas, Texas Discovery Gardens, Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center, the National Weather Service, and Certified Master Naturalists from area chapters, our new core of volunteers are better prepared to help carry out the mission of the Texas Master Naturalist program.



**Class of 2015** Seated L-R: Gayle King, Anne Marie Gross, Training Coordinator Lynn Wisakowsky; Standing L-R: Katie Christman, Robin Sissell, Samuel Largent, Stephen Largent, Ellyce King, Kathy Rushing, Cindy Largent, Cathy Mitchell, Matt Emmons, Rachel Jeske, Don Wheeler, Denise King, Pam Wheeler.



◀ Stephen Largent and Kathy Rushing proudly display the ITMN lanyard, badge, and “wonder bowl” (handcrafted by Paul Grindstaff) presented to each trainee.



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# KACHINA PRAIRIE TRANSECT LINE

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*Project update by Peggy Bailey and Don Hellstern*

We were asked by the Texas Land Conservancy to monitor a transect line at Kachina Prairie. A transect is simply a line or defined swath through an area, used to monitor plant diversity. In January, several volunteers met at Kachina Prairie to mark off a line about 75 yards long with a fence stake at each end. Then we walked a straight line between the posts, identifying as many plant species as possible, both on the line and within arm's length on either side. One person recorded the data while the others identified plants and double-checked findings. For plants we couldn't immediately identify, we took photos so that our data could be updated once the species were correctly identified later. Our goal is to monitor quarterly, with the hope of seeing an increase in native plants and a decrease in woody invasives. For our first data collection in January, we counted 24 species of plants.



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# MOCKINGBIRD NATURE PARK

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A rainy spring at MOCKINGBIRD PARK.  
Trails turned into swamps. Dry creeks into roaring  
torrents and 7 feet of water in the pond!



# *We love our Partners!*

By Charlie Grindstaff, ITMN President

Some may say that being a volunteer for a cause is a “thankless job,” but that’s hardly the case for Master Naturalists! Over the last few months, Indian Trail Chapter members were recognized and thanked at volunteer appreciation dinners hosted by Ellis County, Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center, Texas Wildlife Association LANDS Program, Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT), and Midlothian Parks Department

Indian Trail Chapter is fortunate to have so many great partners in our communities. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service not only sponsors the Chapter but also Ellis County Extension Agent, Mark Arnold, is one of our

Chapter Advisors. Joanne Olsen, Administrative Assistant at the AgriLife Office should be an honorary member for all of the help she provides, usually when we call at the last minute. Many ITMN members volunteer at Dogwood Canyon and were presented with “goodie” bags, including shopping vouchers, at their dinner. Texas Wildlife Association’s LANDS staff knows how to treat their volunteers, they provide breakfast and lunch at the field investigation days we volunteer for...and then they presented the volunteers with recipe books for the foods we have been served all year. Yum! Midlothian Parks Department became our partner during our first year as a chapter, and they are totally awesome to work with, always providing whatever help we have asked for. Not waiting to be asked, they even provided “goodie bags” for the Grapevine Garden Tour. BRIT trains us and then trusts us to mount and sort the plant specimens ... wow, what an honor!

We truly appreciate being recognized and thanked, but really we thank our partners for the privilege to work and learn from them. They may get our time but we get the joy!



# COMING SOON, TO A RAPTOR ENCLOSURE NEAR YOU!

*By Katie Christman, Indian Trail Master Naturalist and Education Specialist, Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center*

If you have had the opportunity to visit Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center in the last few months, you may have noticed a new structure being constructed behind the main building. It's not a shed, a chicken coop or future intern housing, it's a raptor enclosure!

When I was first hired in the month of January of 2014, our director Haily Summerford, expressed her goal and desire to have our own birds of prey on site. What better way to connect people to the National Audubon mission than to have a live raptor face to face with our visitors? The plan to make this successful has been in motion since 2014.

While we have been strongly supported by our board and donors to help raise money for the supplies needed, we could not have reached our goal without our local community of mentors and Indian Trail Master Naturalists and North Texas Master Naturalists to succeed.

In early 2015, Erich Neupert, the Director of Blackland Prairie Raptor Center assisted us in the design of the raptor enclosure by providing the design and served as a mentor for the process of acquiring our bird of prey. He still serves as a wonderful mentor to our staff.

The beginning of June was when the real fun began! The building of a raptor enclosure is not as easy as it looks. Any person or organization that is applying for a permit to house a bird of prey has certain standards to abide by and maintain in order for the permit to be issued from Texas Parks and Wildlife as well as US Fish and Wildlife. Our Master Naturalists worked diligently to make sure that the

enclosures met both State and Federal specifications. Working through rain and heat, they made sure every board was precisely laid. The enclosures certainly have impressed all that have walked by.

In the process of the enclosures being built, I was on the quest to find our first raptor, a quest that proved to be challenging as I balanced the search for available species with the stringent permitting requirements. In the end, it was Erich Neupert who had a bird that is a perfect fit for our staff and the goals we hope to achieve with our raptor program -- a non-releasable Barred Owl that injured its wing in a collision with a truck. Once we are issued our permits we will be able to take possession of this owl from Erich and get him settled into his new home at Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center.

We are so excited for the wonderful opportunity to be working with birds of prey at our Center. It wouldn't be possible without the dedication and assistance from the volunteers of our chapter. If anyone is interested in learning more about this program or how they can support us, please feel free to contact me at [kchristman@audubon.org](mailto:kchristman@audubon.org).



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

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## INDIAN TRAIL CHAPTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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President: Charlie Grindstaff ..... [pcgrindstaff@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pcgrindstaff@sbcglobal.net)  
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## COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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## SUPPORT

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## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY LIAISONS

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