



INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

Jan./Feb. 2015

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

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

From the Desk of the **PRESIDENT**

Charlie Grindstaff, President ITMN

I usually end messages to our speakers with the sentence, "Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, concerns or suggestions you may have." I want to begin my presidency by telling each of you awesome members "Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, concerns or suggestions you may have."

I believe we (not me, not you, but WE) can do incredible things, educational things, fun things this year 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 our communities.

I hope that, like me, you are thinking about where Indian Trail Chapter is heading in 2015 and what role you will play. I encourage you to participate in the projects, committees and activities that interest you. The things I love best about ITMN are the huge amount of sharing within the chapter and the diversity of the membership. Each of us is important to our success and your experiences, knowledge, and involvement improves us all.

Happy New Year! Let's get the ball rolling!

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Calendar of Events, Projects & Meetings **JANUARY**

- 12 Midlothian Volunteer Dinner 6:00 p.m.; RSVP to Aaron or Charlie
- 17 Kachina Prairie Workday 8-11:00 a.m.; will autocancel in case of rain
- 19 Board Meeting 6:00 p.m. Ryan's Steakhouse, Waxahachie
- 23 Kachina Prairie Workday 8-11:00 a.m.; will autocancel in case of rain
- 24 Growing Green Naturally Symposium 8:30-3:00: Farley Street Baptist Church, Waxahachie; See www.green-garden-club.com for details and to purchase tickets \$45.00.
- 26 ITMN Chapter Meeting 6-9:00 p.m.; Program 7:00 p.m.: Bluebirds by Keith Kridler at 7:00 p.m.; First United Methodist Church, Waxahachie

FEBRUARY

- 2 Night Hike Practice, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Mockingbird Nature Park, Midlothian
- 4 Night Hike, Mockingbird Nature Park, 7:30 p.m., Midlothian
- 4 BRIT First Saturday; Fall Harvest 8-1; Farmers Mkt. 8-12
- 6 MNP Workday 9 a.m., Midlothian
- 11 MNP Wildflower Walk 9 a.m., Midlothian
- 18 Kachina Prairie Workday 9 a.m., Ennis
- 20 MNP Workday 9 a.m., Midlothian
- 20 ITMN Board Meeting 6-9:00; Ryan's Steakhouse, Waxahachie
- 24-26 Texas Master Naturalist 15th Annual Meeting, Mo Ranch, Hunt, TX
- 24 Kachina Prairie Workday 9 a.m., Ennis
- 27 ITMN Chapter Meeting 6-9:00 p.m.; Bats by Rebecca Schumacher, Texas Master Naturalist

MARCH

- 1 BRIT First Saturday; Reading Literacy 10-1
- 15 Kachina Prairie Workday, 9 a.m., Ennis
- 17 ITMN Chapter Meeting 6-9:00 p.m.; Election; Recycling and Methane Gas Capture by Greta Calvery, Waste Management Spokesperson
- 21 Kachina Prairie Workday, 9 a.m., Ennis
- 26 ITMN Chapter Meeting: 6:00 - 9:00 pm, Firewise/Burn Restoration by Derek Broman, First UMC, Waxahachie

My apologies for the lateness of this newsletter but I was abducted by...No. Between the holidays and some actual paying work, I simply let it slip. Sorry – JW

Meeting 4th Monday of each month at 6 p.m., program at 7 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, Waxahachie

A CHRISTMAS STORY



Or, the ITMN 2014 Christmas Party at Sharon Lane's Shadow Mountain Ranch



PROJECT VIEWS

It was a little chilly...okay, it was more like cold...but we had a great time at Loma Linda today identifying trees including the HUGEST chittamwood & a pecan tree that may be the largest in Ellis County.



Carolina Buckthorn

We also found strawberry bushes & beautiful Carolina Buckthorn leaves. What an incredible place! There were 9 ITMNers & 3 from the North Texas Chapter.



Strawberry bush



A family from Houston took their vacation in Waxahachie to catch up on their landscape painting. They were spotted at Bullard Heights. They have a studio in Houston.



Winter Friends

by Dan Rayfield

Texas are lucky in many ways. For example, our state is a permanent and part-time home to a wide variety of wildlife. Based upon our geographic location and sheer size, we play host to many winter bird visitors. Lucky too are we that get to play in the woods and fields this time of year because we get to see so many of these winter friends, up close and



personal. I was reminded of this fact a few days ago while maintaining the creek trail on my ranch. It was late in the afternoon and, truth to tell, I was doing more looking and leaning than lopping. The air was crisp and still, and the woods would alternate between near total silence and a chorus of song from a huge group of American Robins. These birds would fly overhead

and across the creek and then come back to the pecan grove behind me, singing madly the entire time.

As I watched the Robins I began to wonder if one of my other favorite birds, the Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*), had also taken up residence. If you have never noticed them, you really should take the time to spot your first one. They are a social bird and are most often seen in groups. I have seen groups numbering in the hundreds together moving from tree to tree. On our place the preferred food item seems to be juniper berries, so watch for a cluster of birds around cedar trees. When you see that flurry of activity, raise your binoculars and prepare for a treat.

The Cedar Waxwing is a medium-sized bird about 6" to 7" long. By way of comparison the common and familiar Cardinal is slightly larger at about 8". The Cedar Waxwing is a sleek bird with a large head, short neck, and short, wide bill. They have a crested head

and black mask, again like a Cardinal. The tail is fairly short and square with a bright yellow banded tip. Cedar Waxwings are

pale brown on the head and chest fading to soft gray on the wings, and the wings have a small cluster of bright red spots at the tip. They derive their name from these red spots as it looked like sealing wax to early observers. The belly is pale yellow. Overall, they are quite the handsome bird and a real treat for wildlife watchers

On the winter afternoon when I went looking for them they were not yet in residence. But I was not disappointed as I did spot other species of our winter bird friends and generally had an enjoyable time NOT working on the creek trail. I know I will wake up one morning soon and the Cedar Waxwings will have arrived for their winter visit. Besides, that trail maintenance work is a great excuse to get back into the woods again.



REGAINING A SENSE PLACE IN YOUR REGION

By Linda Almes

I hate Texas in the summer. Don't even ask me if I am happy here in August. We all know how wonderful Texas can be in spring. Fall is wonderful too-- but summer? I was born here and except for a few months in 1967, I've always lived here. That nagging irritation was on my mind when I looked at the roster of classes for our Annual Meeting. It was time to get up close and personal with my place in Texas.

At the Annual Meeting, the first class I attended was called "Regaining Your Sense of Place: A personal journey to discovering your place in your bioregion". This class was for individuals who wish to develop a new understanding and love for the place in which they live.

That would be me. The class inspired me to discover what I could on the subject. First of all, place or bioregion is a unique area with its own history, watershed, soils, climate, plants & animals.

Knowing your bioregion can help to develop a new understanding and love for the place in which you live. When you have a sense of place, you are connected to it in a real way, and you care about what is happening around you. It can inspire and empower one to take action to preserve it or take part in its restoration. Humans have an innate need to connect to someone or something, a need to bond with others and establish some sense of community. Searching for an individual "sense of place" within our environment is one example of fulfilling this social need."

I started by reading. I read the materials provided in the class, and then read additional materials. There is a lot of information on this topic. Who knew?

This is part of the exercise we did in class: Start by thinking of a place you love, where you have feelings of peace and happiness. This place may be at your current home or may be a place you visit, for example, a park. You want to get to know it on a deeper level. Do the journaling exercise suggested below. This requires paper and pen as you write your observations:

- From where you are reading this, point north.
- Describe the soil around your place.
- Trace the water you drink from precipitation to tap.
- Where does your garbage go?
- How many days till the moon is full?
- What direction do winter storms generally come from in your region?
- What was the total rainfall last year?

- How long is the growing season?
- On what day of the year are the shadows the shortest?
- What is the primary source of electricity in your area?
- Name 5 wild animals that live near you.
- What spring flower is consistently among the first to bloom where you live?
- Name 5 edible plants in your bioregion and the season of availability.
- Name 5 native trees
- List 5 resident and 5 migratory birds in your area
- Name one endangered species in your area.
- What kinds of rocks and minerals are found in your bioregion?
- What geological event/process influenced the landform where you live?
- What was the primary land use history by humans in your bioregion during the last century?
- What were the primary subsistence techniques of the cultures that lived in your area before you?

You may be aware of this information, but I wasn't. I had to look up a few items. Now you have the background data. It is time to hike.

The following is the recommended procedure for the hike, taken from the writings of Mary Coley and used in the class.

Nature Connection Sensory Hike

Have you ever been away from your dwelling place for a few days and returned to be greeted by the familiar smell of home? Maybe it's the carpet cleaner that you use, or the air fresheners, but somehow it just smells like home. We tend to rely heavily upon our sense of sight for identification, often ignoring our other senses of hearing, smell, taste and touch. Sometimes there's that "sixth" sense about a place – an intuitive sense that makes us feel comfortable or nervous or at home. In this activity, you will take a sensory hike around the yard or the grounds of your house, duplex, or apartment building. The questions below will help put you in touch with your senses, and help you discover new ways of thinking about the place where you live.

Step 1: Plan your hike. Are there shady areas and full sun areas you might investigate? Are there plantings, landscaped areas? Are there water features? Select four

to six areas that you want to visit on your hike. Plan to visit places where you can face all four directions (north, south, east and west) as well as areas that are shaded and in full sun.

Step 2: Gather up your supplies. (A notebook, a pen or pencil, a bottle of water, a hat)

Step 3: Find a window of time where you can spend 20-45 undisturbed minutes. Leave your cell phone inside or at least mute it. Your hike will be affected by the time of day. In order to completely experience this sensory exercise, you might want to repeat the exercise several times, experiencing this hike in the morning, at noon, in the evening, and even after dark.

Step 4: At each stop that you have selected, answer the following questions:

- What does it smell like here? Turn slowly in a circle, stopping occasionally. Your sense of smell may be assisted by licking your upper lip. Try smelling at different heights, as if you were a rabbit (four inches), a



coyote (twelve inches), or a deer (two feet). Make a list of what you smell.

- What does it sound like here? Turn slowly in a circle, stopping occasionally. Your sense of sound may become more acute if you keep your eyes closed for a few minutes. Try listening at different heights, as in (A). Make a list of what you hear.

- What does it feel like here? Stand still and notice how your skin feels. Is it hot from the sun, cooled by a breeze, wet from a light rain or fountain spray? Is it clammy with humidity, or dry? Make a note about how your skin feels.

- What do you see from here? Notice the natural (not man made) things that exist around your dwelling place. Turn slowly in a circle, looking at plants, trees, animals, ground and sky. Make a list of what you see. Repeat for each stop on your hike. Then find a place to sit to complete the final two sections of this activity.

Step 5: Write a paragraph or make a sketch to illustrate what you learned about your immediate home on your sensory hike.

Step 6. What about your sixth sense? How does your immediate home/yard make you feel emotionally? Are you comfortable, or uneasy outside? If you are uneasy, are there things you could do or learn about that would make you feel more relaxed? What threatens your security? Is it the wildlife, the unknown, or possible "people" danger that keeps you from feeling entirely comfortable when you are outside? Make a list. Now, consider what you could personally do to relieve your uneasiness when you are outside. This activity can be repeated at different places and in different seasons as you become more comfortable in the natural world. You might want to read some nature writers who have picked up a pen and written about the places they love.

Following the last advice, I found this and it sums up what I now understand: "As time went by, I realized that the particular place I'd chosen was less important than the fact that I'd chosen a place and focused my life around it. Although the island has taken on great significance for me, it's no more inherently beautiful or meaningful than any other place on earth. What makes a place special is the way it buries itself inside the heart, not whether it's flat or rugged, rich or austere, wet or arid, gentle or harsh, warm or cold, wild or tame. Every place, like every person, is elevated by the love and respect shown toward it, and by the way in which its bounty is received."

– Richard Nelson, *The Island Within*.

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.

INDIAN TRAIL CHAPTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Newsletter Editor: Jim West	<i>Newsletter@itmnc.com</i>
Outreach/Publicity Co-Chairs: Pam/Joe Mundo	<i>Information@itmnc.com</i>
Webmaster: Sharon Lane	<i>Webm@itmnc.com</i>
Social Media: Michaela Kral.....	<i>michaelarkral@gmail.com</i>

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