



INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

Sept./Oct. 2015

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

As we are preparing for the 2015 training classes to begin I can't help but think back on our inaugural class five years ago. I remember picking up the manual from Joanne, the excitement of reading the chapters for the first class, the anxiety of thinking I would never remember all the information and the dread upon learning there would be a test at the end. But most of all there was the anticipation of meeting and learning about the other trainees, they had to be interesting people, after all they were into nature. Such diversity of experiences, skills, talents and knowledge...they were, and still are interesting.

And now I find the anticipation is building again; who will these new interesting trainees be? I feel like a child who has found out they will have a new baby sister or brother and just can't wait to meet them and welcome them to our family, make that to our chapter. Like all big brothers and sisters it will be our task to teach, guide and protect them while we learn from them also. I know they will fit right in and bring more diversity, experience, skill and knowledge to Indian Trail Chapter, after all they are into nature, just like us.

Calendar of Events, Projects & Meetings

SEPTEMBER

- 5 BRIT 8 am
- 5 Time Sheets due to Michaela Kral
- 15 Training Class 6 pm
- 19 MNP Wildflower Walk 9 am
- 19 KP Workday
- 19 Training Field Trip to John Bunker Sands Wetland Center
- 19-20 Pollinator PowWow in Kerrville
- 21 Cross Timbers Chapter Meeting 7:00 pm - Sam Kieschnick iNaturalist
- 22 Training Class 6 pm
- 23 Fall begins
- 25 KP Workday
- 26 Raptor Migration Class 8 am Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center
- 28 ITMN Meeting & VMS Training 6 pm; Omar Bocanegra Dragonflies & Damselflies 7 pm
- 29 LANDS/Trinity Waters Field Investigation Day 9:30 am in Ft. Worth
- 30 Grapevine Garden Club Tour of MNP & member wildscapes 9:30 am

OCTOBER

- 1 PFSG 6:30 pm in Waxahachie
- 3 Training Field Trip to BRIT
- 5 Time Sheets due to Michaela Kral
- 6 Training Class
- 7 LANDS 9:30 am Cedar Hill State Park
- 8 LANDS 9:30 am Cedar Hill State Park
- 10 Kids Day at Waxahachie Farmers Market
- 11 Laying Low at Loma Linda Chapter Retreat 1 pm
- 13 Training Class 6 pm
- 15 PFSG 6:30 in Ennis
- 17 KP Workday
- 19 LANDS 9:30 am Ft. Worth
- 19 ITMN Board Meeting 6 pm at Ryan's in Waxahachie
- 20 Training Class 6 pm
- 23 KP Workday
- 24 Training Field Trip to Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center
- 23-25 Texas Master Naturalist 16th Annual Meeting
- 26 ITMN Meeting 6 pm; Jeff Powell Game Warden Duties 7 pm
- 27 Training Class 6 pm
- 30 LANDS 9:30 am Ft. Worth

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

AWARDS

Don Mitchell, Aaron Gritzmaker, Paul Grindstaff & Peggy Bailey recertified. Charlie presented 250 hour milestone pins to Michaela Kral & Sandy Ashbrook. Pam Mundo received her 500 hour milestone pin. July 27. Dan & Deborah Rayfield, Chris Cook, Eileen Berger and Sharon Lane recertified at June 22 meeting. Carolyn Gritzmaker

Debbie Pierce (recertified & 1,000 hours), Patty Ozga (500 hours), Jim Patak (250 hours) & Jim West (recertified). August 24. Don Happ & Carolyn Ross recertified. Lynn Wisakowsky 250 hours Peggy Bailey 500 hours. **2172** volunteer service hours were reported by members of ITMN during the second quarter and 357 advanced training hours. **Congratulations everyone!**



FIELD TRIP: BUSH PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY

Many thanks to Jean for arranging this field trip to the Bush Presidential Center Native Texas Park. We had a great time as you can see in these pictures, although their ADA compliance is questionable. The hubblebees were really

working the flowers over and the variety of wildflowers blooming was spectacular (regular watering will do that). We look forward to going back for the explosion of spring wildflower blooms. Hope the rest of you can join us then.



PROJECT VIEWS

I know I sound like a broken record but seriously thank you very much to everyone who came out to help with the raptor enclosure at Cedar Ridge. This enclosure would not be as far along without your commitment and help. The metal roof is on the closed back half of the enclosure and next Thursday and Friday we will be starting on the fiberglass roof over the open front half of the enclosure. We will be starting at 7:30 in the morning and I hope you can come help. No experience, no problem! Thank you to everyone who came out and worked last week. We got a lot accomplished as you can see.



PETTING BEES



by Charlie Grindstaff

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George Diggs, Professor of Biology at Austin College in Sherman, at the end of his presentation on the “Co-evolution of Flowering Plants and Pollinators” showed a slide of him petting a bee and suggested we should try it. Now I am not saying I am highly suggestible but something about that idea intrigued me. I have always had a love/hate relationship with insects...I find them totally fascinating but I cringe when I think about one of them touching me. Eeeuuu! Okay, ladybugs are the exception. But I am sure I would faint dead away if a ground beetle tried it or heaven forbid a grasshopper.

But what if I was the one doing the touching, not the insect? Could I do it? So he had said the bee needs

to be occupied on a flower slurping up nectar and you should approach from its back side. Our holly was covered with bees that week so I stood watching them. One landed on a flower, I reached out and it flew off. Another landed, I reached out, it flew. I got really close one time but those bees just weren't occupied enough. Or maybe the flowers were so small it didn't take any time for the bees to empty their nectaries.

A week later there was a bee on a dandelion who seemed to be pretty well occupied; I approached, it turned and faced me, this will never work! Then it turned back away from me and I reached out and touched it. I must admit I jerked my finger back with lightning speed but the bee didn't do anything, just kept on slurping. So I reached out and gently stroked my finger down its back. It was fuzzy and soft so I petted it again and again. Wow! I did it and the bee didn't care at all. It didn't flinch, or sting me, or fly away. Well, yes it did fly away eventually but not because I was petting it.

I've petted 5 or 6 bees since that first time and every time it feels incredible, a lovely connection with another creature of nature. Just like Dr. Diggs, I suggest you try it too; BUT NOT if you are allergic to bee stings...a little common sense, please. And truthfully, I am not sure how I will feel if a bee tries petting me but I hope 'lovely connection with another creature of nature' will be what I'm remembering then.

The LANDS Volunteer Training Workshop held on August 19 and sponsored by Indian Trail Chapter was a huge success! There were 39 attendees from three Master Naturalist Chapters and the Ellis County Master Gardeners. Participants learned how to lead various activities which enhance classroom learning

for school groups. These activities create an awareness of wildlife, show land stewardship and/or water conservation.

For more information about the LANDS program or to volunteer to help, contact Sarah Josephson sjosephson@texas-wildlife.org



OH MY DILEMMA

by George Lawton

My dilemma: to keep it neat and trimmed or let it go wild.

As a little boy, my weekly chores included trimming and weeding the many flower beds we had around our house. I also had to edge the sidewalks and the driveway. Bushes had to be boxed and squared. About the time I finished all this, it was time to start over. Everything had to be neat and trimmed. All this was done by hand shears, and a hoe, no electrical or power stuff back then. I did this all the way through high school. Then I went off to college and forgot about the neat and trim stuff. After college, I got a job, got married, and bought a house. And the neat and trimmed bug must have been still in my blood. Everything had to be neat and trimmed. But the difference now is power equipment.

So what is the dilemma? We now have a farm near Nacogdoches, TX. It is mostly slash and loblolly pine with a bunch of dogwood, sweet gum, blackjack oak and various grasses I have yet to identify. But I also have large areas with

lots of Butterflyweed, sunflowers, spotted Bee Balm, and Black eye Susan growing from early spring to the 1st frost. Every few weeks I am surprised to see a new crop of wild flowers coming in. Blues and yellows and orange and white ones.

Before becoming a master naturalist, they were just flowers or weeds or grasses or, as Jack would say, what is a weed to one person is a flower to another. Once I was looking at weeds, now I see flowers. I now want to know the names of all of the flowers and grasses and trees. I have brought several books to help identify the various plants. I've started a digital library of all the plants I find on the farm. I don't just walk down a path, I now look and observe. I have found two very unusual mushrooms/toadstools. I thank the master naturalist course for opening my eyes to nature.

But my dilemma is this: the neat bug is still in my blood. I want to go out and mow everything to make it look neat. My new flower beds had shrubs but now the wild flowers have taken over. I also want to see the beautiful colors of the flowers growing in the pasture. I have difficulty sitting on the porch looking at the beautiful wild and untrimmed areas when my body keeps telling me to go mow the damn things. Oh such a dilemma I have. Hopefully I can fight the urge and keep the wild things blooming.

WHAT TO DO WHEN CATERPILLARS ARE EATING YOUR PLANTS

by Kathleen Mack

A few days ago, I discovered that caterpillars were devouring my dill (*Anethum graveolens* L.) plant. I was thrilled. Not the normal reaction I'm sure, but then I am a master naturalist.

There were a total of 15 rather large yellow, green and black caterpillars on my plants.

A little research revealed that these beauties are the pupae of the Eastern Black Swallowtail, (*Papilio polyxenes*).

Most everyone knows the life cycle of the butterfly. The

Eastern Black Swallowtail, which is a beautiful but common butterfly, will lay its pale yellow eggs on a plant in the Apiaceae (commonly known as the carrot, celery or parsley) family. The plants are chosen because the taste and smell discourage predators. In the case of the dill, the color of the plants also help camouflage the pupae. This particular caterpillar also has an interesting defense. When disturbed it will display an orange forked gland. This gland releases a stinky smell which helps protect them.

When the eggs first hatch, the larvae is black with a white saddle. The saddle contains uric acid which acts as an antioxidant to protect the larvae from toxins in their diet. In a mere 7 to 10 days the larvae will grow to 27,000 of its

original size. It then finds a place to pupate (become a pupa/chrysalis). In another 10 days the butterfly will emerge, and the cycle starts again. In the south 3 generations of butterflies are common. The 3rd generation will overwinter, which means the butterfly will remain in the chrysalis until the weather warms.

So, if you discover that your plants are infested with the caterpillars what should you do? You have several choices. You can sacrifice the plants and enjoy watching the process. If you do decide to sacrifice the plant, the chrysalis can be very

hard to find. Nature is very good at protecting itself. Of course that is my choice, but what if you want the plant? To simply eliminate the larvae, just pick them off the plant. It is not necessary to use a pesticide.

Another option would be to move the pest to another unwanted host plant, either yours or someone who is willing to allow them to eat their plant. Another fun choice would be to move them indoors and raise them. You can make a simple enclosure using an old fish tank. Cover the top with a wire mesh, provide food for the hungry larvae, and add a few branches about the size of a pencil for the chrysalis to hang on. Sit back and enjoy your own nature show, until it is time to release the butterflies.



NATURAL reads

Book review by Jean Kastanek

Plastic: A Toxic Love Story

By Susan Freinkel

“How plastic is my world?” Susan Freinkel asked herself this question one day after hearing news reports about toxic toys and baby bottles. She decided the next day to write down everything she touched that was plastic. By the end of the day, she’d filled four pages in her notebook. The next day she recorded the non-plastic items she touched, which turned out to be half as many.

Freinkel then decided to research the history of plastic and its pervasiveness in our lives. This eventually led to the publication of her book, *Plastic: A Toxic Love Story*, which includes just about everything you want to know about this material, and then some.

The book is divided into eight chapters. In the first half of the book, Freinkel focuses on the history and development of plastic. In the second half, she shares her research into the impact plastic has on our health and environment. In all of the chapters, she uses eight everyday objects to tell the story of plastic: comb, chair, Frisbee, IV bag, disposable lighter, grocery bag, soda bottle, and credit card.

We love plastic because it’s cheap and durable. Many of us hate it for the same reasons. We can’t live with it and we can’t live without it—sounds like a classic toxic relationship. The one question that is raised in one form or another throughout the book is: Does the good outweigh the bad?

In “Humans Are Just a Little Plastic”, Freinkel points out that polymers made possible most of today’s medical marvels, such as plastic pacemakers, synthetic veins and arteries, plastic hips and knees, and implants. So, what’s not to like about a material that literally saves lives?

As it turns out, there are a few things. For example, the vinyl bags used in blood banking contain polyvinyl chloride, better known as PVC. Its chlorine base makes it chemically stable, fire resistant, waterproof, and cheap (since less oil or gas is needed to produce the molecule). Unfortunately, it also makes PVC hazardous to manufacture and dispose of—when incinerated it releases dioxins and furans, two of the

most carcinogenic compounds in existence. Yet, PVC is one of the top-selling plastics in the world, especially for medical devices.

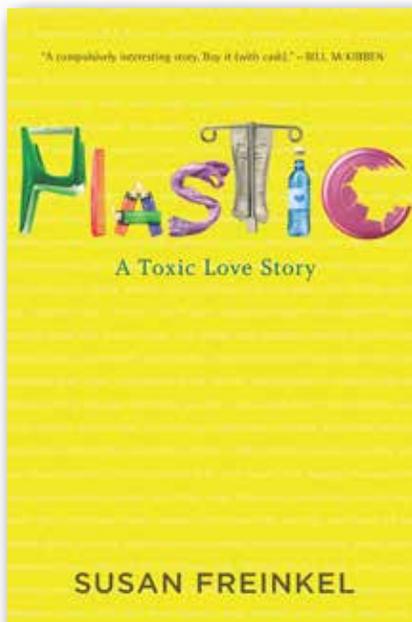
In addition to the above-mentioned chapter, my other favorites are:

“Matter Out of Place”, in which Freinkel explores the impact of plastic on the ocean and its inhabitants, “Battle of the Bag”, a great discussion of plastic bags and our throwaway culture, and “Closing the Loop”, an interesting study of the plastic bottle, with a focus on the PET bottle.

This book is well worth the \$10.00 I spent for it. It includes lots of detailed information, which was

overwhelming at times, at least for me. It might be best to read it in small doses.

The Notes and Bibliography at the end of the book are great references for anyone wanting more information about the effects of plastic materials on our health and the environment. There’s no doubt that Freinkel did her research, and she did it well.



Viceroy

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SNOW

on the something

by Chris Cook

The other day a friend wondered aloud if snow-on-the-mountain was blooming at Kachina Prairie. It was then I realized with a jolt that because I had not even noticed them in the fields that I was finally mentally retired from teaching! In a way that was somewhat sad, but not really; maybe both bittersweet and beautiful at the same time—on to other things now.

You see, in all my years of school here, both for my girls and for me when I began to teach again, the snow-on-the-mountain has been an indicator of change for us, a harbinger that summer freedom was now short and back to school was near. It was time for that mental switch to occur, from the spontaneity of lazy days reading until midnight, working puzzles, swimming, car trips, birdie rides, etc., to the acceptance and excitement of school days again. We knew that with the blooming of the snow-on-the-mountain it was time for school supplies, band practice, backpacks, and maybe a new first day back outfit...and daily structure.

So, on our hottest day so far (106F+) I parked at the Kachina Prairie entrance gate and walked up the path as far as Brother Bison. The heat is palpable, but I like it and become part of it. In the air was a dry rustling aroma that hinted of fall. The racing rush of spring growth that this year seemed almost audible has now become a hushed endurance (well, except for sumac and Johnson grass). Today even the sunflowers seem to be in a holding pattern. But there along the path and across in the distance is the soft sage green of the snow-on-the-mountain, its triple stems already as tall as some of the grasses, its striped

tops open to show the small ivory flowers. Alternate linear leaves staircase up the stalks, just asking for my hand to curl around and follow them up. The softness brings to memory the feel of my babies' faces against my own.

At home I check in my fav ID book, *Wildflowers of the Texas Hill Country* by Marshall Enquist, but his snow-on-the-mountain does not look like ours. My next go-to is Ricky Linex's *Range Plants of North Central Texas*, and I find out that what many of us know here as snow-on-the-mountain (sure, like maybe our closest thing to a mountain is Bristol?) is really snow-on-the-prairie—much more appropriate!

Here's the official scoop: *Euphorbia bicolor*, spurge family, native perennial here July-November, white margins on leaflike bracts below small white flowers, milky sap (irritating alkaloids), lower single red stem, branching upper stem often in threes, black roundish seeds (pretty) in hairy green case. Reportedly poisonous to grazers (why we have so much of it—they don't eat it), large colonies (looks white like snow), best adapted to clay soils on prairies (duh, why it's not in the hill country book), seeds eaten by dove, quail, and songbirds (as Martha says, that's a good thing).

Well, Mr. Linex is all science; me—I'm science, too, but I have a love affair with snow-on-the-prairie

that transcends all the data. Check out this wildflower as you ride around our country roads, or come to Kachina Prairie and walk the path. See this beauty up close, feel its smoothness—but don't get "sapped." And remember those feelings we all had that it's just about schooltime again.



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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NOTE: We will be training on the VMS (Volunteer Management System) online timekeeping system at our Sept. 28 meeting. Please try to come if at all possible. This will be the best time to learn how to enter your volunteer service hours and advanced training. It will be very helpful if Michaela can teach us as a large group instead of individually.