



INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

Dec./Jan. 2017

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, Indian Trail Chapter

Thank you so much for the privilege and honor of serving as your Indian Trail Chapter President for the past two years. Your dedication and enthusiasm for the Texas Master Naturalist program inspire and motivate me. I cannot recall one instance where I requested help and at least one member didn't volunteer. A few years ago a member of another Master Naturalist Chapter told

me that Indian Trail Chapter was "small, but mighty." I like to think we have grown in both numbers and "mightiness."

Someone asked me what I was going to do now that my term is over; hmmm.... I will do exactly what you do....stay involved, volunteer when asked, be a good land steward, and hopefully make the next President's job a little easier. I look forward to working right alongside you incredible members. Again, I say Thank You, y'all are **THE BEST!**



Pied billed Grebe © JimWest

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

NATURAL

Notes

Wilson's Phalarope *The Gender Bender*

By Sue Frary

You can always tell "drive-by birders." We are the erratic drivers who come to a sudden screeching halt, back up real slow, then hang out the window with binos in hand, still backing up. We are the cars parked on the wrong side of the road, with a ginormous camera lens out the window pointed at some little itty bitty bird off in a tree, and you can hear us screaming "lifer, lifer whooo!" We are a little short of the requisite set of marbles, that's for sure. But getting a new bird for one's life list is a real kick, especially a block from your house.



© Sue Frary

Late last April we had a real goat-floating rainstorm in Ellis county, flooding a bit in downtown Waxahachie and making big muddy puddles and temporary ponds in the fields. As a dedicated drive-by birder, I headed out to check the local puddles looking for birds other than the usual grackleflock, and whoooo...came up aces. Right by the roadside beyond my driveway was a flock of about 30 Wilson's Phalaropes ... they of the backwards gender behavior. Along with them were American Golden Plovers, Least



© Jim West

Sandpipers, and a Red-headed Blackbird. Aces! The phalaropes, pretty little members of the sandpiper family, were on their spring migration from the salt lakes in the Andes to the wetlands of the Sierra and the Pacific Northwest, resting up in Waxahachie after the storm. They don't normally hang around, so seeing a bunch of them for a couple of days was a treat.

These birds reverse the usual "gaudy feathers on a breeding male and the drab gals take care of the nest" assumption. Phalarope females are more brightly colored and larger than the greyish male. The lady phalarope lays the eggs, but then runs off to find a new mate, leaving dad to raise the kids. She's the real-life Mayzie Bird of Dr. Seuss fame. Well, it works for them; there are a lot of phalaropes. Thanks dads. There are three living species of the genus Phalaropus: Wilson's Phalarope (*P. tricolor*), the Red Phalarope (*P. fulicarius*), and the Red-necked Phalarope (*P. lobatus*). They are unusual among shore birds as they prefer swimming to wading, sometimes swimming in tight circles to stir up critters for lunch. The word phalarope in Greek means "coot-foot", referring to the lobed feet the phalaropes share with coots (gee, who knew? .. had to look it up). The conservation status of Wilson's Phalaropes is "Least Concern", however they breed in marshy wetlands and large scale reclamation or alteration of these wetlands in the west would threaten the species.

Look for Wilson's Phalarope in large flocks in late April to early May during their migration, especially at the John Bunker Sands Wetlands or in the Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge.

Natural Notes

Common name: *Wilson's Phalarope*

Species: *Phalaropus tricolor*

Order: *Charadriiformes*

Family: *Scolopacidae* (Family includes sandpipers, yellowlegs, willets, woodcocks, snipes, red knots, turnstones, whimbrels, curlews, godwits, and phalaropes)

Key identification Characteristics

- small shorebird, smaller than a killdeer
- slender neck, and very thin, straight, long bills and pale grey crown
- grayish with cinnamon or rusty highlights, particularly on the neck
- breeding females more colorful than males with dark line through the eye and extending down the neck
- non-breeding birds are pale grey above and white below without strong facial markings
- only shorebirds which regularly swim in deep water, dabbling for food items
- often swim in circles

Wilson's Phalarope
Phalaropus tricolor

RANGE DATA



DECEMBER | JANUARY 2017

DECEMBER

- 1 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day (9:30am-1:30pm), Leo Ranch
- 1 Plant Family Study Group: (6:30 pm)
- 1 CoCoRaHS Webinar: "PRISM Climate Group" (12pm)
- 3 BRIT Work Day (9am-12pm)
- 3 Beginning & Advanced Bird Walks (9am-12pm)
- 3 First Saturday Event (9am-12pm), Botanical Research Institute of Texas
- 4 Hoots and Hops Fundraiser for Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center (3-6pm)
- 6 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day (9:30am-1:30pm), Bear Creek Ranch
- 10 Indian Trail Chapter Christmas Party
- 16 Kachina Prairie Workday (9am-12pm)
- 17 Winter Bird Count (10am-4pm), Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center
- 17 Bunker's Pond Trail Walk (10am), John Bunker Sands Wetlands Center
- 19 Indian Trail Chapter Monthly Meeting (6pm); Program (7pm):
- 21 Winter Solstice
- 25 Christmas Day

JANUARY

- 1 New Year's Day
- 1 Christmas Bird Count, Cedar Hill
- 5 Plant Family Study Group: (6:00 pm)
- 16 Indian Trail Chapter Board Meeting, Ryan's in Waxahachie (6:30pm)
- 19 Plant Family Study Group (6:30pm)
- 20 Kachina Prairie Workday (9am-12pm)
- 21 Bunker's Pond Trail Walk (10am), John Bunker Sands Wetlands Center
- 21 Stars and S'mores (6-8pm), Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center
- 23 Indian Trail Chapter Monthly Meeting (6pm); Program (7pm)
- 28 Kachina Prairie Workday (9am-12pm)
- 31 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day (9:30am-1:30pm), Bear Creek Ranch

★ AWARDS ★

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



Charlie Grindstaff and Eileen Berger were recognized at the Annual Meeting for reaching 4,000 hours and 2,500 hours of service respectively. Don Happ, Patty Ozga, and Lynn Wisakowsky were also recognized for 500 service hours.

2016 Recertification: Celia Yowell, Sandy Ashbrook, Jim Patak, Don Mitchell, Carolyn Ogden, Jean Kastanek



New Certification:
Robin Sissell,
Denise King

★ AWARDS ★



2016 Recertification -- Linda Almes, Dan Rayfield,
Rebecca Schumacher, Pam Mundo

New Certification -- Cindy Largent

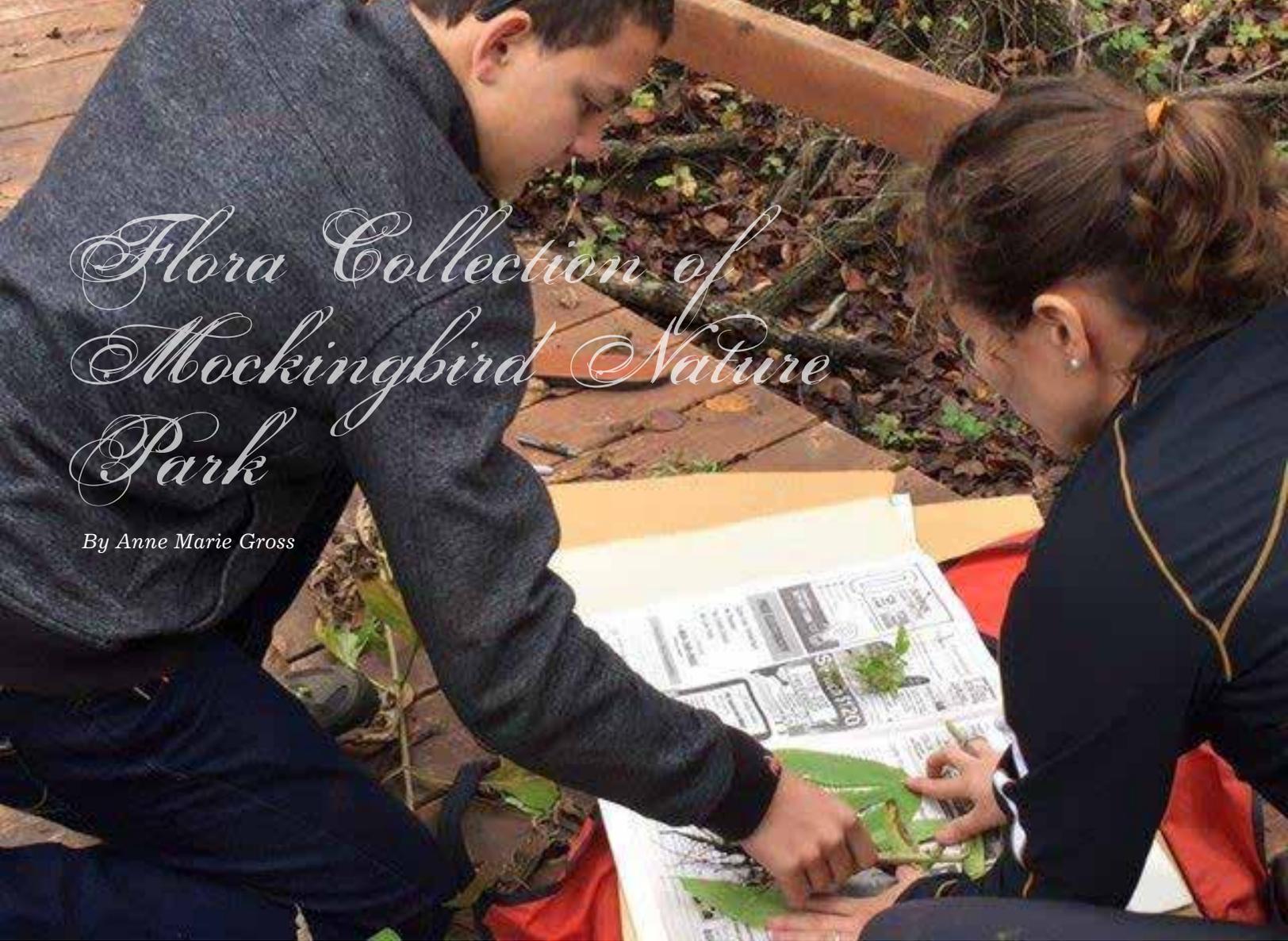
New Officers Elected

By Charlie Grindstaff

At the November 28, 2016 meeting, Indian Trail chapter members elected Don Happ and Denise King to serve as President and Treasurer, respectively. I would like to thank them both for their willingness to take on administrative offices for Indian Trail Chapter.

When we joined the Texas Master Naturalist program we saw ourselves saving wildlife, improving the environment and educating the public; but definitely not sitting at a computer doing administrative tasks. I am not sure who we thought would handle those mundane tasks, but thank you for recognizing that we are the ones who need to step up and wear many hats. While your work will sometimes be cumbersome, labor intensive, thankless and mentally draining; it will also be what allows our chapter to continue to grow and flourish. Having held both of your positions in the past, I want to thank you now for your willingness to serve and look forward to supporting you in these important offices.





Flora Collection of Mockingbird Nature Park

By Anne Marie Gross

Last month Indian Trail chapter member Stephen Largent met with Charlie Grindstaff and Tiana Rehman, the Herbarium Collections Manager at Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT) to collect plant specimens at Mockingbird Nature Park.

Mockingbird Nature Park represents one of Midlothian's most pristine and biologically diverse public areas, and through his collection, Stephen will be helping to create a critical "snapshot in time" of the plant diversity within the park.

With assistance from Tiana, Stephen carefully gathered the first specimens of his collection, pressed them, and recorded valuable data that will accompany the vouchers when added to BRIT's herbarium. When Tiana spoke with our chapter at the May

monthly meeting, we learned that although BRIT contains more than 1,000,000 specimens, there is little representation from Ellis and Navarro counties. Stephen's work and resulting flora collection will help build the historical record of our area's plant life and

aid scientists who rely on herbarium specimens for their research.

Stephen is working towards his goal of receiving the William T. Hornaday Award, which is the most prestigious conservation award from the Boy Scouts of America. Dr. Hornaday was a pioneer in wildlife conservation and avid supporter of scouting.

If you would like to help Stephen collect and identify plants, please contact him. You can help him by collecting the weekly publication *The Greensheet*, which is the perfect size for plant pressing.



Texas Master Naturalist 17th Annual Meeting

By Eileen Berger

The 17th Annual Meeting was held October 21-23, 2016 at La Torretta Lakeside Resort on beautiful Lake Conroe near Montgomery, Texas. Lake Conroe is a constant level lake with homes, marinas and businesses right by the water,



as was our location. Whether staying in the hotel tower or in the golf cabins near the golf course, we were able to watch some beautiful sunrises over the lake.

Several groups of Indian Trail members carpooled to the meeting mid-day on Friday. After checking in to our cabins, we quickly found our way to the conference center to attend our choice of many different afternoon sessions. I attended the four-hour workshop, "Bird Song: a First Guide to Recognizing Songs and Calls." Although the presenter was having some technical issues, we muddled through with

help from the audience and their smartphones until the problems were fixed. Never underestimate the power of a determined group of naturalists!

All the presentations were

centrally located near the ballroom where we had our delicious meals. There were many activities and events going on throughout the weekend to keep us busy. The entries for the Photo & Art Contest as well as Chapter

Contest for scrapbooks, newsletters, and brochures were displayed near the dining room, which made them easy to view and vote for our favorites. Another ballroom held the many silent auction items donated by chapters as well as vendors providing educational materials and selling naturalist related goods and artwork. If you were interested in yoga, someone was leading yoga each day outside near the lake. On both nights, black lights were set up near the lake to attract nighttime insects. These were a very popular attraction for Master Naturalists attending the conference as well as other guests at the hotel.

On Saturday we had our choice of more workshops at the conference center and field sessions; I took a bus trip to the Sam Houston National Forest to view prairie restoration efforts by the U.S. Forest Service. We toured a prairie that had just had a prescribed burn the week before, and a larger one which had shoulder-high grass as well as wildflowers. My one hour sessions included one on Caddo Lake and another about the efforts to eradicate giant salvinia from the lake. I also learned about red wolves, and conservation at Connemara Meadow.

On Sunday morning, I learned a lot about Texas Department of Transportation and their efforts to help pollinators, the geology of Reveille Peak Ranch, and amphibians and reptiles of Texas. After checkout and a quick lunch nearby, we headed back home. It was a busy, informative, and fun weekend ... well-worth the commitment!



NOTEWORTHY

Texas Master Naturalist 17th Annual Meeting

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS



The Texas Master Naturalist™ program began as a statewide initiative during 1998. The program is jointly sponsored by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and is supported by more than 416 additional partnerships through local chapters statewide.

- Through December 2015, with combined efforts of 46 recognized local chapters, the Master Naturalist program has trained 10,430 volunteers (758 of those were new members trained in 2015).
- Master Naturalist volunteers dedicated over 429,134 service hours in 2015, directed toward natural resource community projects, research, and outreach resulting in a cumulative total of 3.262 Million hours of service to date.

- The economic impact of Texas Master Naturalist volunteer service throughout 2015 is valued at \$9.87 Million and \$75 Million to date.
- These 10,430 volunteers also obtained 54,006 advanced training hours in 2015 and over 500,855 AT hours to date.
- TMN volunteers conducted over 4,144 outreach, education and technical guidance events in 2015 with over 64% of those events being direct contact programs where volunteers provided hands-on outreach, education or consultation to nearly 169,000+ youth adults and private landowners.
- Today, through both Direct and Indirect Outreach events, Texas Master Naturalist volunteers reach an average of 400,000+ each year.
- To date Texas Master Naturalist volunteers have made over 5.356 Million public contacts through their volunteer

service while spreading a conservation and natural resource message.

- Program volunteers have impacted or conducted projects on areas of land that involve roughly 2,594 new acres in 2015 and 221,357 acres of habitat to date.
- Over 68 new interpretive trail miles were developed and/or maintained in 2015 bringing our program's total impact on trails mileage to 2,015.63 miles to date.
- 30 International, National, State and Local Awards have been received for Texas Master Naturalist program, chapter and individual volunteers' efforts to date.
- Over 78% of Texas counties (200 Counties) are served by a recognized Texas Master Naturalist Chapter.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

Denise King

By Anne Marie Gross

AMG: Tell us a little bit more about your life outside of Texas Master Naturalist.

DK: My partner Marc Smith and I have been together for 14 years, although we've known each other for 25. Marc's daughter is a veterinarian assistant in Wisconsin, and together we have four furry kids, all who've been rescued: our cats Lucky (who runs the house), Dakota, and Callie; and our dog Solomon who is co-pilot for Marc on his long drives in his 18-wheeler. Together, we're one big, happy family!

AMG: How did you become interested in Texas Master Naturalist? What projects do you enjoy the most?

DK: I became interested in the Master Naturalist program because with our property, we seem to always be fighting trees, bushes, grass, etc. I thought if I learned more about them, then we would know what to fight and what to embrace, enhance, and grow. I also wanted to be involved with a group near where I lived. It's been wonderful to be part of a group so passionate about what they love. Before becoming a Master Naturalist volunteer, I had never slowed down enough to appreciate my surroundings, but this group inspired me to do just that – stop, look, and listen to all the wonderful things around us.

AMG: What nature/environmental issues interest you the most?

DK: Preserving and enhancing native plants to help

protect those that are counting on them, and also learning to be more environmentally friendly. I love learning how everything is connected and dependent on one another.

AMG: What is the most rewarding thing about volunteering?

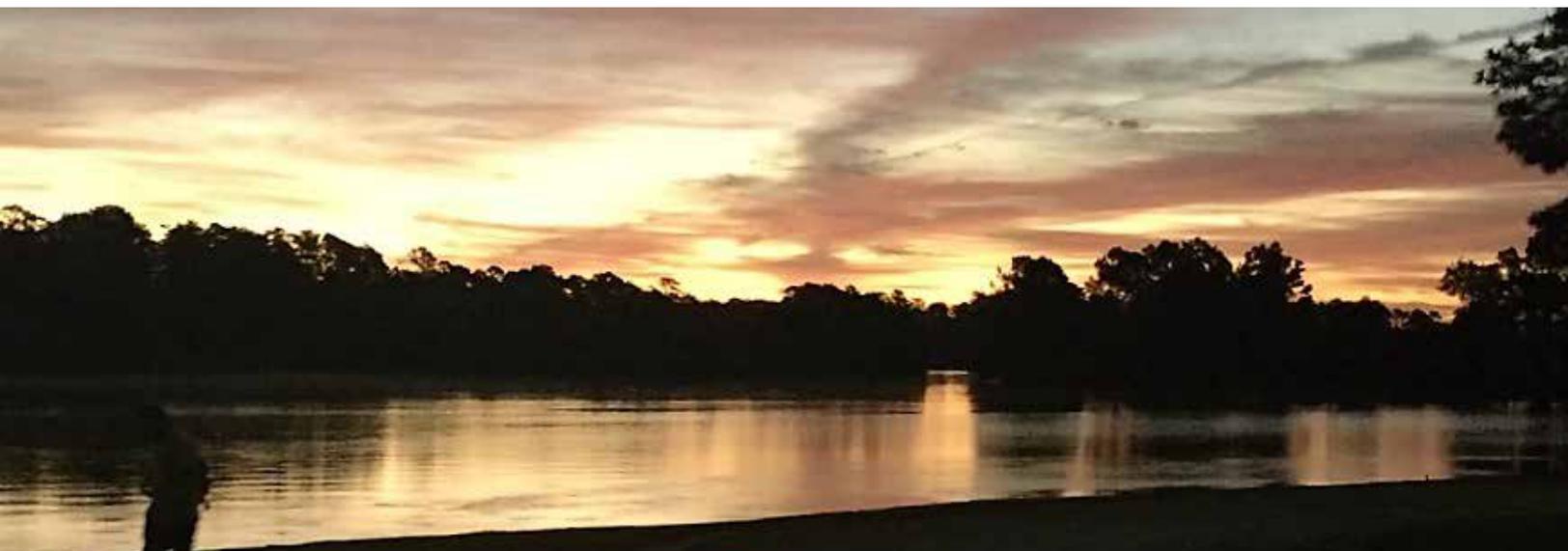
DK: Watching the excitement on people's faces when they see or learn something new. Not just on the faces of children, but also with the adults. I also love being part of it all and continuing to learn with every activity I participate in. It's all so exciting!

AMG: What activities do you enjoy when you're not busy with chapter programs?

DK: Spending time with my family is very important, and I try to do that as much as possible.

AMG: Do you have any special plans to get out and enjoy nature in the coming year?

DK: Yes, we're going to try to go to Gatlinburg, Tennessee to see the Smokey Mountains. I also hope to take a trip to Big Bend State Park; after hearing other volunteers share how wonderful it is, I'm looking forward to experiencing it myself.



CLASS OF 2016

By Anne Marie Gross

Congratulations to our newest graduating class of Master Naturalist volunteers! Like each class before them, this group of students enjoyed a unique bond as they learned about the natural history and ecological processes of our local ecosystem. After completing their course of classroom and field learning, new pledges are now ready to work towards their certification. I know I speak for all Indian Trail chapter members in welcoming you to our team.





Northern Mockingbird © Jim West

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Katie Christman

The largest running citizen science project is gearing up for another year! Are you ready? The annual Christmas Bird Count has picked up steam in recent years and never disappoints, whether you are a novice or experienced bird enthusiast.

The notion behind taking a “bird census” was started on Christmas Day in the year 1900. Proposed by ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, this census would replace the annual Christmas “side hunt,” a nineteenth century tradition of hunting birds. Today, participants from around the world eagerly gather to hunt with their binoculars instead of guns.

Unlike Project FeederWatch that relies on individuals to count birds seen at their own backyard feeders, Christmas Bird Count is organized as events to tally total bird counts within in an established 15-mile circle. Volunteers follow specified routes within this circle and count every bird they see or hear. The more

volunteers who participate, the more eyes there are to count birds within the designated range.

While the Christmas Bird Count is a bird nerds dream (and can often be a competition of how many one can participate in each year), the real life data that is collected is vital for research and conservation

projects. Often, this data is combined with breeding bird survey projects and gives scientists a broad picture of the overall health of bird populations and how they may be changing over time.

Christmas Bird Count events are organized by local communities from December 14, 2016 - January 5, 2017. Check out the Houston Audubon website (<http://houstonaudubon.org/birding/bird-surveys/christmas-bird-counts/>) for details on Christmas Bird Count events throughout the state of Texas.

Locally there are count events scheduled to take place in Cedar Hill and Dallas County, and there are many more. I encourage all of you to

participate in at least one Christmas Bird Count this year! Be sure to follow the link and sign up early so organizers can give you more details and a team assignment.



Hermit Thrush © Jim West

MOONLIGHT MORNING

By Chris Cook

September. Full moon. 6:02 AM. My backyard. I'm writing by moonlight this morning. The still dampness envelops all. I listen for the usual sounds of the day beginning and hear nothing but low cricket-whining and distant droning of traffic. The birds have yet to announce their presence to each other. My cat Lizzie and the blue-grey neighborhood wild cat sit companionably about ten feet apart, sharing the silence. Shadows are sharp and unmoving--the roofline and my head and shoulders look black and solid.

Bird wings flap once in the live oak. A small dog soprano-yips in a faraway yard; a cat mews once in the alley. Silence can often be loud, but the touch of it seems very quietly palpable. Almost a feeling of the primeval pervades my awareness. A timeless moment -- just existing, just waiting. Breathing. Hanging in an ancient reverence. Basking in morning moonlight. The hush of it fills my being with peace. A car door slams; the spell is broken. Someone is rolling the garbage can out to the street. One dog barks and another answers. Car lights invade my space. Coffee time.



American Kestrel New Education Bird at Dogwood Canyon

By Katie Christman

If you have ventured to Dogwood Canyon lately, you may have noticed our newest pint-sized avian resident. This raptor, an American Kestrel (*Falco*



sparverius) was found as a fledgling by a member of the public who decided to keep him for a while. Raptors and other species of birds are vulnerable during specific stages of their development during which they imprint on the "thing" they most associate with. A human-imprinted bird often shows no fear of people and lacks many skills needed for its survival. Thus, it will be deemed non-releasable.

Unfortunately, this kestrel imprinted on humans during a critical stage of its development. Eventually, it was turned over to Blackland Prairie Raptor Center in Lucas, TX. Although deemed non-releasable, it was decided that this bird would be a perfect fit as an avian ambassador for our educational programs here at Dogwood Canyon.

The kestrel is a fierce predator in open fields and prairies. Weighing in at six to eight ounces, these birds feast on insects, rodents and other birds. Kestrels can be year-round residents here in Texas and rely heavily on cavities and nest boxes to raise their young. The American Kestrel population has been declining due to pesticide use and habitat loss.

Come on out to Dogwood and meet our new kestrel. We look forward to seeing you there.

NATURAL reads

Book review by Charlie Grindstaff

The Field Guide to Fields, Hidden Treasures of Meadows, Prairies, and Pastures

by Bill Laws, National Geographic Books ©2010
Quid Publishing ISBN 978-1-4262-0508-8

I was intrigued by the title of this book, *The Field Guide to Fields*, which, as happens often, is cause enough for me to purchase. The back cover had this quote from Bill Laws: “From pasture to paddy, from cornfield to cotton field, and from vineyard to hop yard—fields are full of life...” That was good enough for me.

The Field Guide to Fields is really an informal guide, 222 pages in length with some 300 color photographs and prints. Twenty-two plants each have a full page detailing their identification, historical use, significance and/ or worldwide cultivation information. These plants include emmer, corn, rice, potatoes, bramble (blackberry), sugar cane, coffee and sunflowers.

The author begins with a mystery, the impromptu birth of agriculture some 12,000 years ago; which he suggests may have caused the birth of civilization. “The domestication of crops was a truly global event, occurring spontaneously and largely independently in different regions at different times.” He cites Malaysia, the Mediterranean region, Mesopotamia, Africa, Mexico and Peru as locations of earliest evidence. Then he proceeds from communal fields to the controversial fenced fields and landowners versus tenants, from grain crops to animal farming to cultivation of herbs and spices (the latter not being essential to sustain life, but it sure made the unrefrigerated meats more palatable and were often used for medicinal purposes).

This global guide includes history, bush/ wild food, flora/ fauna, tools/ technology, field music/ art, and weather forecasting based on the natural world.

At first, harvest yields were so small that barely

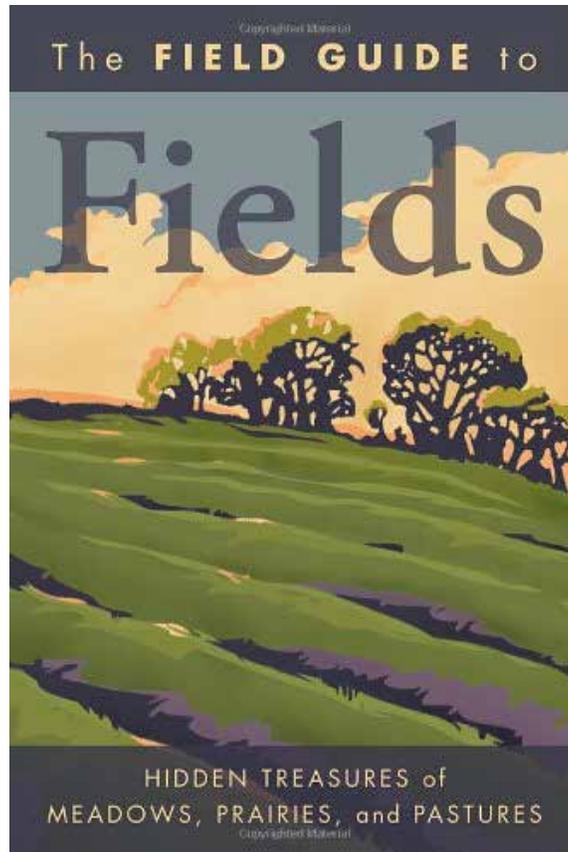
enough seed could be held back for the next season; but as yields improved, granaries separate from the farmhouse were built for grain storage. Pests had to be controlled and mills built. All of these topics and much more are covered. I really enjoyed this book right up to the last chapter, Field Folklore, which for some inexplicable reason contains many typographical errors. There were no distracting typos in the rest of the book.

The author repeatedly suggests that man needs to rethink his approach to fields. To quote from the book

“In the 10,000 years that we have lived off the field, plants have kept this cycle of life stable....In the last 2,000 years most of the natural vegetation has been replaced by the managed vegetation of the fields. Too often it has been mismanaged; overdrained, overgrazed, or simply replaced with field crops that eventually prove to be unsustainable.” “If we are to continue living off the land, and feeding a growing world population, we must learn to appreciate field plants.”

While the author mentions the over 12,000 reported crop circles in England, Russia, Japan, France and North America, he has not solved their mystery, any more than the phenomenon of the birth of farming all those years ago.

From the book I also gleaned or harvested a few nuggets. I learned that going “haywire” is derived from the difficulty in handling the coils of wire used to bind hay when haymaking was first mechanized. “By hook or by crook” comes from tools used for weeding corn and hay. The hook (“ground sharp both behind and before” as John Fitzherbert recommended in his 16th century Book of Husbandry) is intended to cut the weed at the earth and a forked stick is used to hold the weed if it is too short; and with these two tools, the farmer will not need to stoop to do his work. And lastly, “when cows lay down in the field, wet weather is on the way”. While I haven’t had a chance to verify that nugget yet, rest assured I will be watching the fields for confirmation.



Words & Pictures

Shari Hornish, Artist

I paint because it's in me to paint and has been since I picked up that first crayon sixty or so years ago. Who can explain it? They say there is an element of autobiography in every piece of fiction, and, if that's true, then my paintings of birds are, to some degree, self-portraits. You may not

recognize me up there on those limbs, light as air and free as - well, as a bird. It's me, nevertheless.

I began painting trees about ten years ago because I love their shapes, textures, and colors. They're very willing sitters and never complain or ask to be compensated for their time. And all trees are dedicated environmentalists.

I paint birds and their surroundings because they fascinate me. I watch them from every window in my house, and I contemplate their lives in contrast to my own. They endure the storms of spring, the heat of summer, and the ice of winter. They give us their songs and their beauty and then die without a fuss. My poor paintings are the best tribute I can make to

them at this point. I am still trying to do better.

Shari Hornish is a Dallas artist. She can be reached at sharihornish@yahoo.com

Words & Pictures features artists, photographers, and writers who are passionate about our natural resources. To recommend an artist for future issues, please email the Trail Marker editor, annetgross@gmail.com.



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