



# INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

Feb./Mar. 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**

*Donald Happ, President, Indian Trail Chapter*

Thanks to all Indian Trail Master Naturalists for the opportunity that you gave me as the new president. I wish everyone a great and prosperous year as Nature Nerds.

The first thing that I learned as president is that what you see at meetings reminds me of an iceberg. The only thing you see is the little piece sticking out of the water. You don't see all the endless hours that many wonderful people cheerfully spend preparing for meetings and events.

I am especially looking forward to our many outreach events over the next two years. We have a great opportunity to share our knowledge and love of nature with more people. I didn't realize that not everyone got to play with mudbugs when they were children or pick dewberries for pies and cobblers.

We can help so many people get the satisfaction of spending time outdoors and the excitement of learning about our world without batteries or extension cord.

We have started the year off with a sad note as we lost Debbie Arnold. She was the first person I met at a flower walk. She was such a warm and enthusiastic person that I quickly saw that Indian Trail Master Naturalists was something I wanted to be a part of.

Thanks to all the presidents that came before me and now support me. I am looking forward to many happy hours of fellowship with our Nature Nerds. We are proud to be called Nature Nerds because it lets people know we work hard but also love to have fun.



Donald Happ



Dawn, Red Tail Hawk © JimWest

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

# ITMN Annual Christmas Party



Chapter members gathered at the home of Celia and Charlie Yowell for the December meeting/Holiday Party. Good food, friends, gift exchange and telling stories around the Yowell's fire pit made for a well-deserved evening of merriment and relaxation.



The Grey Ghost of the Plains. Male Northern Harrier. © Jim West





# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

## Lynn Wisakowsky

By Denise King

I grew up on a farm in northern West Virginia which was surrounded by woods. I have wonderful memories of packing a bag of supplies and taking my dog for long walks exploring the forest and wading in the creek. We moved to Dallas, Texas when I was in junior high school.

As a senior in high school, I was selected to take Biology II at the Museum of Natural History in Fair Park. The class was taught by the curators of the museum. We worked behind the scenes of the museum. We collected, mounted, examined and created study skins for the museum collections. We studied each display and learned the intricacies of the museum. This was where I was introduced to the concept of the conservation of our environment and the natural world.



I attended Texas A&M University where I received a degree in education. I taught for biology several years in the public school system. I then went to East Texas State University where I received a master's degree in earth science. I then moved from teaching into hazardous materials safety and training, where I had my own business for 15 years. During my career, I volunteered at the Museum of Natural History and Dallas Aquarium. I also taught hands-on elementary science classes at the schools in Waxahachie where my children attended.

While attending Texas A&M, I met my husband, Gene. We have a son, who works for our family business, and a daughter, who attends Texas A&M in Commerce. We also have two Labrador retrievers and two well attended bird feeders.

When I retired from my training business, I was trying to decide what I wanted to do with my time when I read about the Master Naturalist program in the Waxahachie newspaper. I attended several of the monthly programs and then signed up for the 2013 training class. Taking the class was like coming home to the enthusiasm for the plants, animals and environment that I sorely missed while career choices moved me in a different direction.

I find it extremely rewarding to work with the training classes and introduce the trainees to the Master Naturalist program. It is exciting to watch their enthusiasm grow and then find their path within our organization.

My husband and I enjoy travelling, often with two other couples who are our friends. We have been to New Zealand and are now embarking on what we call our "National Parks Tour." So far, we have been to Yellowstone, Glacier and Grand Tetons. Next up are the parks in the New England area.

My hobbies are reading and walking in the woods at our lake cabin in central Texas. Nothing is more enjoyable than being outside listening and observing the world around me.



# Confessions of an Accidental Birder

## ... or, How Birds Can Take Over Your Life

By Sue Frary. All photos by Sue Frary

I didn't grow up noticing birds. I grew up in a very large city which was mostly paved over. Not many parks, not many trees. Even the local river was paved over. As a kid I knew robins, blue jays, mockingbirds, mourning doves, crows, and seagulls. That's it. And, believe it or not, I managed to wander through my whole life ignoring the birds all around me. Silly, no? Well, yes, really silly. I've lived in Vermont, Virginia, California, and Texas, and have travelled a great deal. Birds were everywhere. But did I notice? Nah, I had better things to do.

Then one fine morning after my retirement a few years ago, I was sitting on the dock of the bay ... literally. I was in Crescent City, California, gateway to Redwoods National Park, having coffee outside a harbor cafe early in the morning and waiting for the fog to lift. The pink rhododendrons were in full bloom, photos of the redwoods in the mist were going to be awesome, whoooo! John Muir was in my head. But as I watched the seals in the harbor and



Wood Duck male, *Aix sponsa*

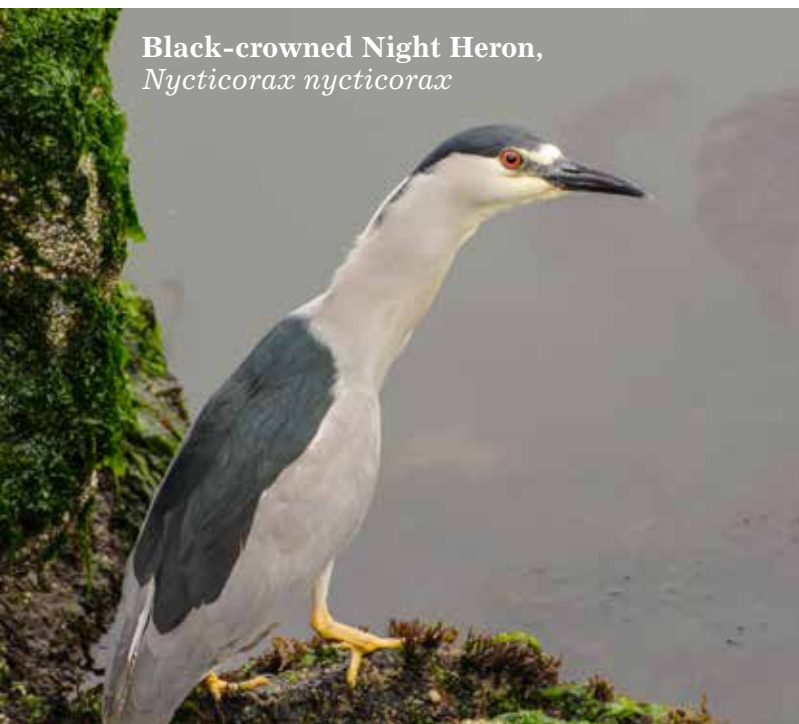
penguin certainly, not in Northern California. If it was, it was very, very lost! Not a pelican either, that much was obvious. Surely it wasn't some weird sort of rare seagull. I was clueless. Snapped a picture. Then the ghost of John James Audubon flew into my head, ran off John Muir, and hooked me on birds.

I knew less than zilch about birds, and that bothered me, so I went to the bird expert at the park headquarters to get this critter's name. After a long talk with a park ranger master birder, that little accidental find on the dock of the bay turned me into a beginner birder. I was stunned at the vastness of the bird world I'd been ignoring all my life. Now I had to hurry to catch up with all the birds I should have known, or wished I had known, all these years.

Please, take my advice. If you want to start birding, just go do it. Start in the Walmart parking lot with grackles and doves. Notice what else flies by; photograph them; watch what they are doing. Maybe you'll find a Western Kingbird, *Tyrannus verticalis*, on a phone pole, or the gorgeous little American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius*, just hanging overhead in the wind, or the little



Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura*



Black-crowned Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*

contemplated breakfast with John Muir, I looked down onto the breakwater rocks and staring me in the face not more than three feet away, was this Black-crowned Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*.

It looked rather like a penguin, I thought. Not a

*continued*



## Birder

brown bird with the (maybe) yellow butt you will spend a week online trying to identify from a fuzzy far away photograph. Sit by a pond, sit in your backyard, or sit in a park and watch what the bird world is doing. Take notes. Report what you see on eBird so that the ornithologists at Cornell have your data. I guarantee you, it is a lifelong education and will soon become a lifelong passion. There are 644 species of birds reported in Texas alone, and in excess of 10,000 species worldwide. You will never run out of birds.

Snowy Egret, *Egretta thula*



### Here's my list of things that helped me as a beginning birder:

- Books - *Sibley's Guide to Birds* (there's an app, which I seem to use more than the actual book), just for grins "A Supremely Bad Idea" by Luke Dempsey

- Movie - "The Big Year" (2011) with Jack Black, Steve Martin, and Owen Wilson - just so you know how very crazy it could get.
- Apps - From the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Merlin (quick IDs in the field), and eBird (reporting sightings, Citizen Science). Using eBird really helps the ornithologists track what habitat change does to species.
- Binoculars - You can spend a small fortune on optics, but for beginning I'd recommend Nikon Monarch 5 series binos. Nice and light, tough, reasonably priced. Lust after the big scopes that cost more than your car later... :-)
- Website - AllAboutBirds.org, again from the Cornell Lab. Audubon has a website too, and birdy things are all over the internet, but I use the Cornell site most of the time.
- Camera - Any camera will do for ID purposes really... just sneak up on the critters. Good bird photos are largely a matter of patience and luck anyway. Any photo you can use for ID is a good photo ... even an iPhone on the dock of the bay!



Eastern Bluebird,  
*Sialia sialis*

Stay in school, they said.  
They'll never find you there.

# My Adventures Camping in a Truck Tent

By Eileen Berger

Becoming a Master Naturalist in 2010 opened up many new interests and opportunities for adventure. I began visiting Texas state parks out of curiosity and to support the Texas State Park system. At first I took day trips to state parks in my area of North Texas, including Meridian, Cedar Hill, and Whitney. However, since most of my free time was during the summer, I found that even leaving my house at 6:00 a.m. was not early enough for me to arrive at the park and hike before it got too hot. That's when I decided to start camping in state parks with screened shelters. I had camped in tents for many years with my (now-ex) husband and children, but since I was now camping on my own I wanted a little more structure between me and "nature".



I was able to enjoy several state parks that had screened shelters, including Tyler, Ft. Parker, Corpus Christi Lake, and Lake Colorado City. My choice of places to visit was still limited, though, as not all the parks have shelters. My daughter suggested that I look into purchasing a truck tent, which I could put up in the bed of the pickup. That sounded like the perfect solution! I looked on the Internet and found one especially for my truck model, ordered it, and soon had the tent. My air mattress would fit in the bed just barely, with a little room to walk beside it to get out.

My first outing with the tent was to Caddo Lake in East Texas. I had taken the precaution of assembling the tent on my truck while it sat in my driveway to

make sure I could figure it out before I arrived at the park. It was a good thing that I did that in advance, because I discovered that I needed to bring my kitchen stepstool with me in order to erect the tent, as well as enter and exit. I packed a fan, a few books, and food and was all ready for this new style of camping.

My trip to Caddo Lake was in early June. We had been having some rainy weather as usual in the weeks leading up to the trip, but as I had already arranged for the three day trip, I took my chances that it would not "rain me out". I arrived in the early afternoon, set up the tent, took a hike and watched birds and wildlife. I made my fire in the campsite's barbecue pit, cooked my filet mignon and baked potato, and ate supper. I washed up my few utensils, put everything away, and got ready for bed. A little after I went to bed, it began to lightly rain. I was happy to find that the tent was very waterproof, and I slept soundly.

When morning came, I was excited to set out for an early hike, but the weather did not cooperate. I was disappointed to find that it was still raining. I made myself something for breakfast that would not require making the fire again. Now, what to do until it stopped raining? I pulled out a novel as well as my nature guides, and I read through the morning.

The rain was relentless. After a few hours, I decided to drive around and explore the park's roads from the comfort of my truck. I carefully backed out of the parking spot, and slowly made my way along the roads. It quickly became very clear, however that I risked losing my only shelter for the night. Even driving five miles per hour, the still-erected tent was whipped by the wind. Note to self: don't try to drive with the tent up!

I returned to my campsite, not disgusted ... but almost. OK, now what? Wait it out and hope it stops raining? Pack up and go home? I toughed it out, staying the rest of that day, snacking from my emergency food supply, and sleeping one more night in the rainy forest. The next morning I packed up and drove back home to Waxahachie.

Was the trip a complete washout? Not at all. I saw some interesting birds and wildflowers, got to sleep to the sound of rain falling on a roof, finished my novel, and learned about some new facts about the birds and wildflowers in my guide books. Oh yes – and I learned that I can't plan to drive once the tent is erected. It was an adventure, and after all, that's what makes it fun!



# Notable NATURE

## Turk's Cap

By Chris Cook

Need a shrub that will take the Texas heat? Grows well in sun, shade, or most soil types? Pretty well takes care of itself? Then be sure to consider Turk's cap, *Malvaviscus arboreus*.

A drought hardy herbaceous perennial, Turk's cap dies to the ground in our north central Texas winters but may stay green all year in south Texas. But come spring through late fall it can grow to an average size of 4ft by 4ft, and more, providing your view with pleasurable green and red accent for many months. The plant received its common name because the scarlet flower structure with its bright yellow protruding stamens was thought to resemble a Turkish fez hat. Turk's cap is in the mallow plant family. Its leaves are a medium green, darker in the shade; in full sun the leaves may crinkle to reduce surface area, and are often held in a more vertical position to reduce sun exposure. Unlike most mallows which have an open flower face, the five red petals of Turk's cap remain coiled around the stamen column that extends beyond the enclosing petals.

When the petals fall off, the fruit is a small green ball held in a surrounding sheath. As the fruit ripens it

expands (1/2 to 3/4in.), turns white and orange, and then red when mature, this color change happening rather quickly after it begins, within a day or overnight. The fruit shape is a mallow family signature—flattened globes usually referred to as cheeses, reminiscent in shape to the dairy cheeses. The fruit eventually falls off but may stay on the plant for several days.

The seeds inside the fruit are contained in a circle within a mealy pith that is edible and is said to have an apple-like flavor. Supposedly these fruits can be made into jelly or added raw to salads or eaten raw (if desperate?) as a snack. I look forward to seeing how many have become red overnight; on returning recently from a Thanksgiving trip, I gathered 39 fruits from my two bushes.

Turk's cap is a good choice to fill an open space in a garden or a foundation line planting area. It is easy to prune and responds to layering. Being a native plant, it looks at home in a natural style garden and extends its bloom time beyond most one-season-only other native plants. Its flowers attract hummingbirds and several butterfly species, offering nectar late into the year. Many birds and other animals eat its fruits. Turk's cap has been a successful plant in Texas gardens for decades and should be easy to locate in plant nurseries. Varieties in white and pink are also available. If you like the suspense and pleasure of trying seeds, let me know—friends share!

**Common Names:** *Turk's cap, Drummond's Turkschap, Wax Mallow, Red Mallow, Texas Mallow*

**Scientific Name:** *Malvaviscus arboreus*

**Family:** *Malvaceae*

### Key identification Characteristics

- Perennial, spreading shrub that grows 2'-6'.
- Alternate, palmately lobed leaves
- Flowers are 2-3" long with red, hibiscus-like petals most often seen closed, with bright yellow column of stamens protruding from center
- Blooms late-spring through November
- Fruit resemble small (1/2"-3/4") cheese-shaped globes; white and orange colored fruit, maturing to red

### Learn more about Turk's cap:

[wildflower.org](http://wildflower.org)

[aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/native-shrubs](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/native-shrubs)

[npsot.org/Home/plant-profiles](http://npsot.org/Home/plant-profiles)

[www.foragingTexas.com](http://www.foragingTexas.com)



Photos by Chris Cook

# NATURAL reads

Book review by Charlie Grindstaff

## *Lone Star Menagerie, Adventures with Texas Wildlife*

By Jim Harris, Republic of Texas Press © 2000

I loved this book! You gotta read it! Facts, fiction, folklore, and lots of fun ... it is all here! The author tells you right up front, "I'm a naturalist, not an "official" scientist; consequently this is a book of natural history and not an "official" scientific text. Although most of what I have to say is verifiable zoological data, every now and again I've thrown in some hearsay, some history, some folklore, and the occasional tall tale." And he makes sure you know which of those it is. He chose 20 subjects and devoted about ten pages to each.

He begins Lone Star Menagerie much like we do our Master Naturalist training, with an overview of the ecoregions of Texas. He is especially enamored with the Big Thicket in the Piney Woods, "officially known as the Biological Crossroads of North America." He claims more plant species can be found there than in any other area of comparable size anywhere on the globe. Supposedly you can find more than 5,000 species of wildflowers, tumbleweeds to bamboo and species from alligators to panthers, which included feral longhorns at one time

Then he moves on to his 20 chosen subjects...longhorns, first. And to those who think longhorns aren't really wild animals, he wonders if Angus or Herefords could have crossed mountain ranges, flood-swollen rivers, survived blazing sun and drought, hailstorms and blizzards, fought off grizzly bears and packs of wolves, and bushwhacked their way through thickets of prickly pear cactus. Point well taken.

I must admit that the chapter on Buzzards was my favorite. A six foot wingspan on a three pound body. The author's escapades as a teenager trying to catch

one to enhance his chances of joining Marlin Perkins' Wild Kingdom had me laughing out loud. He allows that the California condor is the biggest and rarest of our three native species, but other than that, it is just another buzzard. Fossil remains prove it was a Texas resident a long time ago, of course.

Having never seen a live horned toad, this chapter was very informative to me. Did you know they have expandable ribs to modify their shape for maximum or minimum heat transfer (the original solar panel) or to look larger and make predators think twice before attacking?

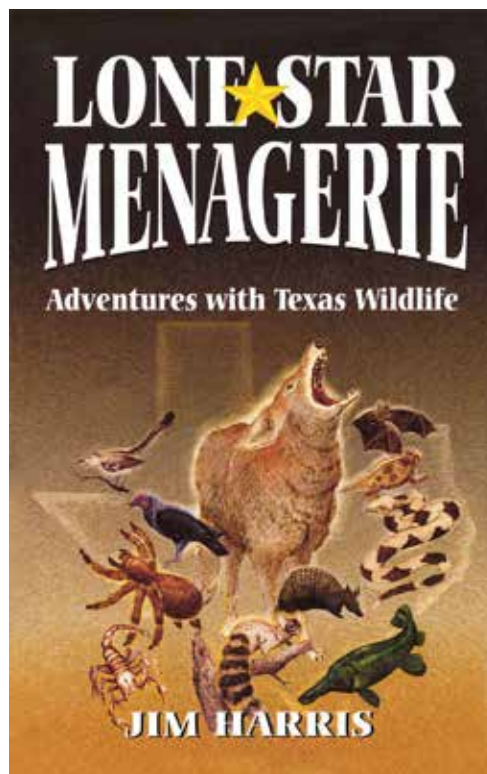
I wish I could tell you about every chapter, but this is supposed to be a book review, not a book. Let's see if I can tease you with some of the fun facts. Ringtails

make a sound like a cross between a high-pitched bark and a whoopee cushion when surprised. There used to be a bounty on roadrunners when it was thought they ate baby quail (they don't, and the bounty is gone). Scorpions are practically blind, totally deaf and can't smell much (good thing they have a poisonous stinger to capture the prey they accidentally bump into).

Mr. Harris suggests that because the bat is the only mammal that can fly, people are jealous and are often fearful of them. Interesting to read that sonar technology was not inspired by bat echolocation; in fact, sonar technology inspired a biology student to guess that bats were doing the same thing. The Choctaw tribe called mockingbirds, hushi

balbaha "the bird which speaks many languages." Javelinas are basically promiscuous and who knew they can improve the range land by eating plants that are of no value to cattle. Whooping cranes and sandhill cranes have an unusually long windpipe coiled up like a French horn inside the hollow of their breastbones which allows them to produce such loud, resonating calls that can be heard for miles. The chapter on coyotes was a delightful mix of facts, folklore and the author's personal experience. The difficulty in getting armadillos to breed in captivity makes for good reading too.

Lone Star Menagerie is one of the books in the ITMN library. I hope you will check it out, literally.





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# FEBRUARY | MARCH 2017

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## FEBRUARY

- 4 BRIT Work Day (9am-12pm)
- 4 First Saturday Event Botanical Research Institute of Texas (9am-12pm),
- 4 "Introduction to Permaculture for Home Gardeners," Botanical Research Institute of Texas, preregistration and fee, (10am-noon)
- 10 Moon Watch at Mockingbird Nature Park, 6 pm
- 14 Valentine's Day
- 16 Plant Family Study Group (6:30 pm)
- 17 Kachina Prairie Workday (9am-12pm)
- 20 President's Day
- 21 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Mansfield (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 22 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Mansfield (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 23 "Introduction to Plant Identification" Webinar by Ricky Linex (1pm)  
<http://www.conservationwebinars.net/webinarsintroduction-to-plant-identification>
- 27 Indian Trail Chapter Monthly Meeting (6pm); Program (7pm) "Harvesting Native Texas Plant Seeds" by Randy Johnson:
- 21 Winter Solstice
- 25 Midlothian Mayor's Winter Walk, Mockingbird Nature Park (10 am)
- 25 Kachina Prairie Workday (9am-12pm)

## MARCH

- 2 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Panther Island Pavilion (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 2 Plant Family Study Group: (6:00 pm)
- 4 BRIT Work Day (9am-12pm)
- 4 First Saturday Event (9am-12pm), Botanical Research Institute of Texas
- 4 "Introduction to Vegetable Gardening," Botanical Research Institute of Texas, preregistration and fee, (10am-noon)
- 7 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Panther Island Pavilion (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 9 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Panther Island Pavilion (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 11 Wildflower Walk Volunteer Training (details to be sent to chapter members)
- 16 Plant Family Study Group (6:30pm)
- 18 Mockingbird Nature Park Wildflower Walk (9am)
- 25 Lawn & Garden Expo, Waxahachie (9am-5pm)
- 26 "Hoots & Hops" Fundraiser for Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center (3-6pm)
- 27 Indian Trail Chapter Monthly Meeting (6pm); Program (7pm) "Our Native Bees" by Carolyn Gritzmaker
- 30 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Bear Creek Ranch, (9:30am-1:30pm)

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## IN MEMORY OF DEBEE ARNOLD

*By Charlie Grindstaff*

We are saddened to learn of the passing of one of our earliest chapter members, Debee Arnold. Debee graduated with the class of 2011 and served as Chapter Hostess/Greeter in 2012 and 2013. Her smile & laugh were infectious. She attended the 2011 TXMN State Meeting in Ker-ville, TX and had a great time, She loved to participate in our night hikes at Mockingbird Nature Park, serving as a "station master" for whatever we were featuring.

We were all totally impressed with the owl nest she created for our owl prowl in 2011. She

was an active participant in our First Best Ever Chapter Retreat. Debee loved all animals, especially the dogs she bred, several of whom found their way into members' homes. Health problems prevented Debee from being an active member the last couple of years but she often called to tell me how much she missed ITMN and how she wished she could still participate. Debee was a fun, big-hearted, hopeful person who exuded joy to the end.



**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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## SUPPORT

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Cerf Park Butterfly Garden: Linda Almes ..... [almesli@hotmail.com](mailto:almesli@hotmail.com)

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## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY LIAISONS

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Botanical Research Institute of Texas: Debbie Pierce..... [debbiekpierce@att.net](mailto:debbiekpierce@att.net)  
Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center: Michaela Kral ..... [michaelarkral@gmail.com](mailto:michaelarkral@gmail.com)  
John Bunker Sands Wetland Center: Maureen Nitkowski..... [maunitka@att.net](mailto:maunitka@att.net)

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





**Monday – February 27, 2017**

**“HARVESTING SEEDS”**

**Location: First United Methodist Church  
505 W. Marvin Ave., Waxahachie, TX  
Family Life Center - Gathering Room**

**Indian Trail Chapter, Texas Master Naturalist**

- **6:00 PM - Business Meeting**
- **7:00 PM - Program by Randy Johnson, President – Dallas Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas**

Randy Johnson is the past Director of Horticulture at Texas Discovery Gardens and he currently serves as the Horticulture Manager at the Dallas Zoo. From Mesquite, TX, Randy attended Texas A&M University where he earned a degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences. He is the current president of the Dallas Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas and also has a personal business - Randy Johnson Organics, through which he grows and sells native plants and offers consultations on various environmental topics.

Randy will provide an instructional presentation on harvesting seeds.

Indian Trail Chapter is part of the statewide Texas Master Naturalist Volunteer Program of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

*The 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.*

This program is part of a series of “no cost” “open to the public” Master Naturalist programs offered the fourth Monday (generally) of each month, 7:00 – 8:00 p.m. Please bring a friend! For more information, please call the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension at 972-825-5175 or email: [information@itmnc.com](mailto:information@itmnc.com)

# Mayor's Winter Walk

sponsored by  
**Methodist Mansfield  
Higginbotham Brothers Ace Hardware**

*Saturday, February 25*  
**Mockingbird Nature Park**  
*10am*

Rainout date:  
March 4

Nature activity stations  
along the 1-mile trail  
hosted by



**Indian Trail  
Master Naturalist  
Chapter**

presented by

**Midlothian Parks & Recreation Department**  
Enjoy goodie bags and healthy snacks!\*

\*while supplies last

Mockingbird Nature Park -1361 Onward Road

**FREE** online registration at  
[www.midlothian.tx.us/winterwalk](http://www.midlothian.tx.us/winterwalk)

or for more info (972) 775.7177