

INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

Feb./Mar. 2018

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

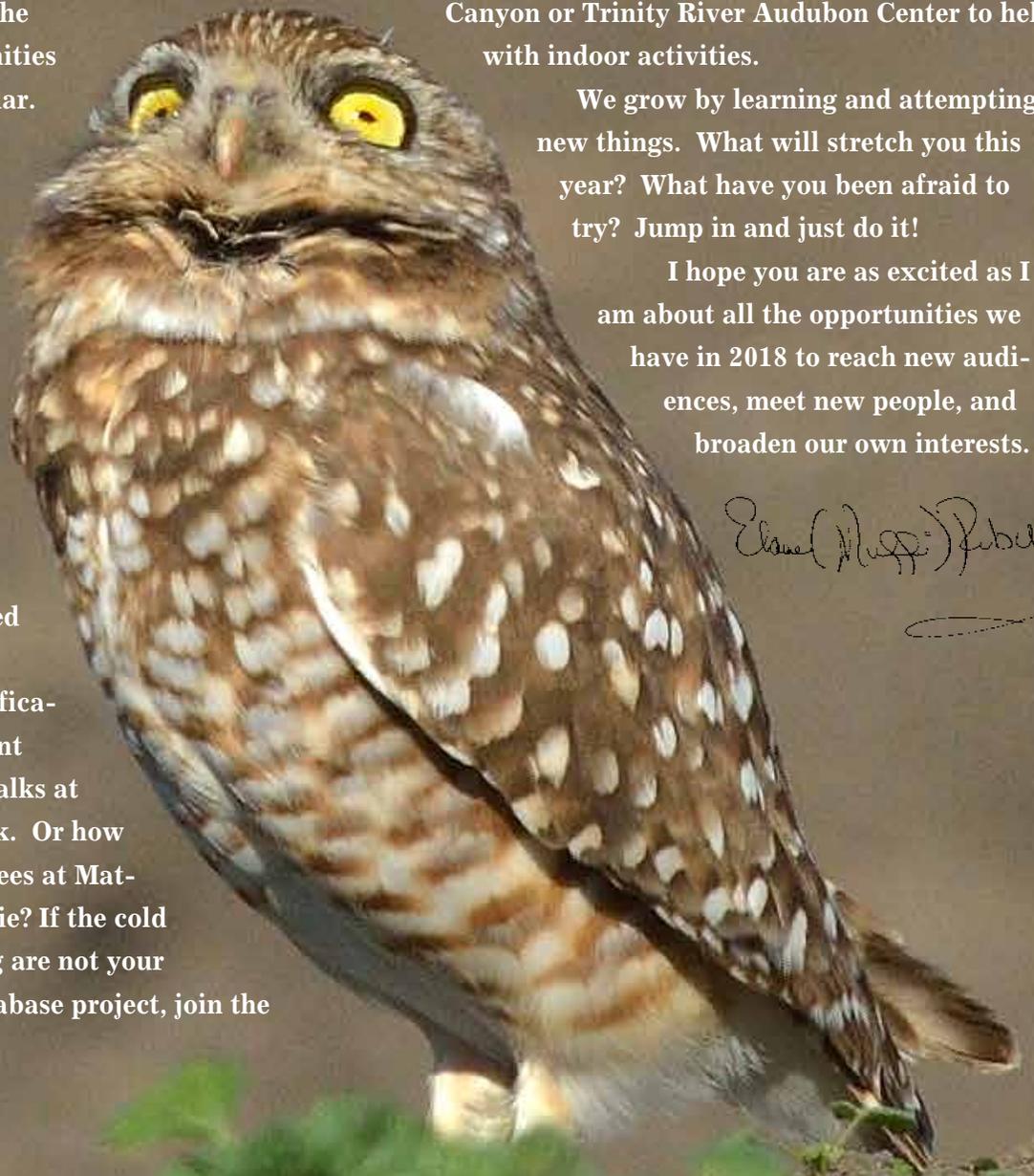
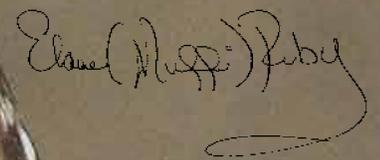
Elaine "Muffi" Ruby

Brrr! It's been cold, but spring will be upon us soon, as will the many volunteer opportunities quickly filling our calendar. Lend a hand at a L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day. Kachina Prairie has been approved for a burn for their prairie (hopefully in February), and workdays resume at both Kachina Prairie and Mockingbird Nature Park this month. Volunteers are also needed to help with the Mayor's Walk, Winter Tree Identification Walk, Medicinal Plant Walk, and Wildflower Walks at Mockingbird Nature Park. Or how about helping us plant trees at Matthews Park in Waxahachie? If the cold temperatures and driving are not your friend, join the BRIT database project, join the

Feeder Watch program, or come over to Dogwood Canyon or Trinity River Audubon Center to help with indoor activities.

We grow by learning and attempting new things. What will stretch you this year? What have you been afraid to try? Jump in and just do it!

I hope you are as excited as I am about all the opportunities we have in 2018 to reach new audiences, meet new people, and broaden our own interests.



Burrowing Owl © JimWest

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

NOTEWORTHY



TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Winter Treats

Yes, the day started out cold, but you don't notice it so much when you are doing something good for nature and having fun with friends. This year we had 19 members (and a few family members) making treats for our feathered friends and caravanning from the Cerf Butterfly Garden at the Ennis Library to Bullard Heights Neighborhood Park in Waxahachie, then on to Mockingbird Nature Park in Midlothian. Many thanks to Rena Sutphin for organizing this fun annual event. And thanks to all the members who made bird treats and came out today to hang them.

habitat actively conserved by a coalition of the Ennis Garden Club, Indian Trail Master Naturalists, City of Ennis and the Texas Land Conservancy. As part of his Eagle Scout Project, Zivan designed, created, and secured donors for a bench and distance markers.

Kachina Prairie Markers

Many thanks to Zivan H. Zuniga from Troop #210 for the beautiful bench and markers at Kachina Prairie – the 30-acre remnant of Blackland Prairie



NOTEWORTHY



Congratulations Indian Trail Chapter!

Charlie Grindstaff, Membership Chair

As of today, January 5, 2018, Indian Trail shows 88 active members on our roster who provided 8,818.7 volunteer service hours (VSH) and who completed 1,347.45 advanced training hours and 707.25 initial training hours in 2017. Our VSH are valued at \$23/hour so that is a whopping \$202,230. I expect these numbers to go up since members have 45 days to get their

December hours entered. Of our 86 eligible members, 70 reported hours in 2017. (Mox Moxley and Sara Cornett as lifetime members do not report hours.) Don Happ, with 721.25 hours, recorded the most hours worked this is not a competition, but I want to acknowledge his hard work on behalf of the Indian Trail Chapter. Congratulations, and thanks to you all! Your friendliness, creativity, enthusiasm, and hard work make this such a great chapter, and I am proud to be your colleague.



Notable NATURE

Eastern Collared Lizard

By Gwen Eishen

This last summer, I took a group of high school students on a week-long camping trip in Palo Duro Canyon State Park in the Texas panhandle. While the weather was brutally hot and dry, the diversity of wildlife we observed was very memorable, including Painted Bunting, Wild Turkey, Roadrunner, Texas horned lizard, and a couple western diamondback rattlesnakes. The most unique, however, was the eastern collared lizard.

The students and I had never seen this reptile before, so to help take our minds off the heat of the day, we spent our hikes looking for them. The landscape in the canyon is a mosaic of juniper, mesquite, yucca, prickly pear, native grasses, and wildflowers. The soil has a reddish tone, which made the eastern collared lizards stand out with their very distinct bright blue-green body and small white spots. They were littered along the trail every 50 yards or so. Our presence did not startle them, and we were easily able to get close enough to take pictures.

Once back in Dallas, I learned that males have the bright blue coloration and females are lighter brown throughout, but the black color band around their necks is a good identifier. Their diet consists of insects and small spiders when young, and then snakes and smaller lizards as they get older and larger. Their distribution covers most of West and Central Texas, stopping just before the I-35 corridor along DFW to San Antonio. I was shocked, because I had visited

many other state parks within that range, yet had never seen one before.

While the plants in their native habitat are also found east of I-35, the climate here has more precipitation and humidity. This would cause more plant diversity, which leads to more animal species diversity, and competition for all. Less rocks and safe basking areas could also limit their survival here. Using my nature-nerd spidey-sense I decided to check iNaturalist to see the lizard diversity observed within our state and area. In Texas there are 18,553 observations of lizards (Suborder Sauria) with 51 species represented. That's a lot of lizards! Of those, however, there were only 247 observations of eastern collared lizards. The closest observation to the DFW area was recorded on May 8, 2005 in Palo Pinto County west of Mineral Wells.

With urban sprawl, environmental factors, and competition from green anole, Texas spiny lizard, and Mediterranean house gecko, it's unlikely that any eastern collared lizards will grace our area. If you have a chance, though, I highly recommend a short drive west of here to watch these striking lizards dart across the landscape.

Species Profile

Common Names: *eastern collared lizard, common collared lizard*

Scientific Name: *Crotaphytus collaris*

Family: *Crotaphytidae*

Suborder: *Sauria*



continued next page



Key identification Characteristics.

- Size 8-14 in including tail
- Distinct black bands around neck resembling collar
- Males bright blue-green body and brown head; females light brown body and brown head
- Able to run on hind legs
- Habitat – dry, open regions of Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Kansas, and Missouri
- Diet – insects and small spiders when young; snakes and smaller lizards when adult

How About Some Respect?

By Jake Calvit

We are all familiar with the hackberry tree and its ubiquitous presence in our urban landscapes. Numerous saplings have encroached upon the prairie landscapes as well.

The hackberry was probably the first tree that I learned to identify. The raised lenticels on its bark that look somewhat like warts are always a dead giveaway. I remember the hackberry tree that grew at the end of our driveway in DeKalb, Texas; the yard would be littered with the brittle limbs after a good rainstorm. At our house in Waxahachie, there was a gigantic hackberry that was completely hollow in our front yard.

There are two species of hackberry, *Celtis occidentalis* and *Celtis laevigata*. Each has some interesting qualities that make hackberry advantageous in urban forestry.

The small fruit on hackberry trees is high in protein and plays a vital role in the survival of several migratory birds including quail, ring-necked pheasant, wild turkey, cedar waxwing, sharp-tailed grouse, yellow-bellied sapsucker, mockingbird, and robins. The fruit is ingested and then eliminated by the

birds, which helps the trees to proliferate, a blessing or a curse depending on their intended use.

Besides its fruit, both species are hosts to gall-producing insects. Squirrels feed on the galls after the insects have hatched. Insects that overwinter in the cracks of the bark will become food for birds in spring and summer.

Its thin bark makes the hackberry tree susceptible to several fungal species which can cause butt rot. Butt rot tends to eat the tree from the inside out. Ecologically speaking, this is not necessarily a bad thing because it is creating habitat and food for forest

creatures, particularly birds.

Hackberries are excellent at sequestering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. They also produce a commercially viable lumber that is used in furniture frames and veneer.

Because of their small size, they are may be preferable to other species in public parks or other open spaces.

After researching for this article, I have more appreciation and respect for the hackberry tree, and I hope you will as well.



NATURAL reads

Book Review by Charlie Grindstaff

Plants That Changed History

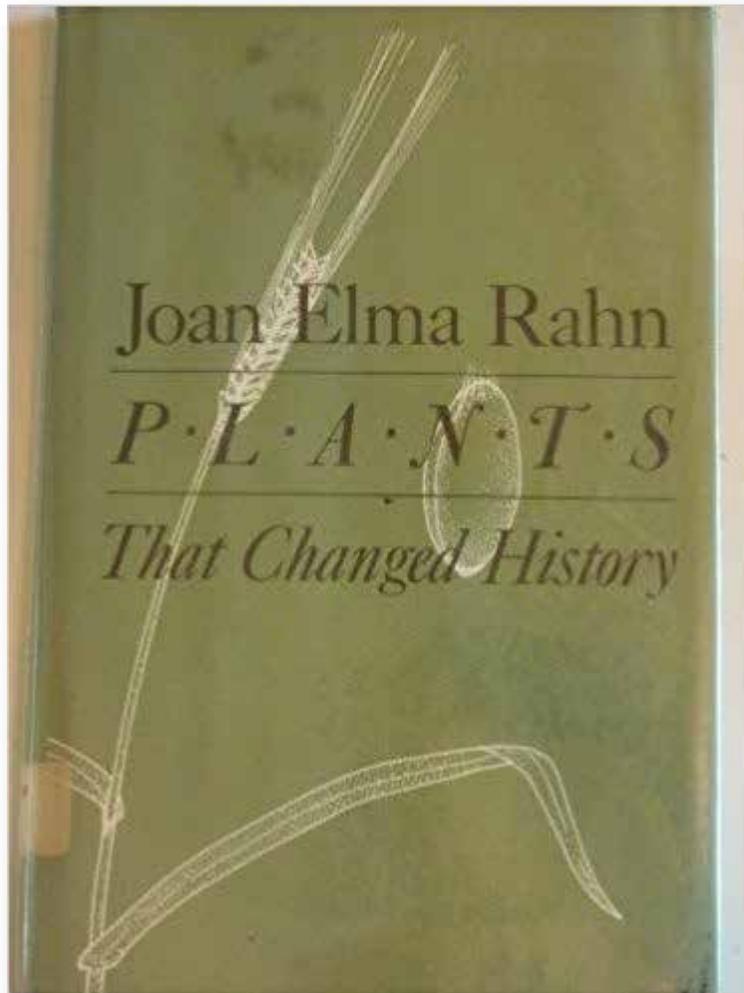
Written and illustrated by Joan Elma Rahn

Published by Atheneum in 1982

Before you read this review of *Plants That Changed History*, take a few minutes to jot down 5 plants you think changed the course of history ... these are not specific plants, well a couple actually are, but the others are more like classes or types of plants. Now, let's see how your guesses (and mine) compare to those identified by the author.

Having previously read *The Field Guide to Fields* I knew cereal grains (wheat, corn, oats, etc.) had to be number one. Grains allowed society to stop following the food around nomadic style and gave rise to farms and villages. Grain seeds are small, easily stored and, as long as they were kept dry, they would provide food throughout the winter. Major lifestyle change.

And with a little thought, I guessed spices had a great impact on history. Imagine trading an ounce of gold for an ounce of pepper ... yes, it was that valuable at one time. But the desire for more and less costly spices led to great ocean voyages around the world to find the source of the spices. In 1418 Portugal established the first school of navigation, which launched the race to find a route around Africa to the fabled Spice Islands (which they finally found in 1511). In the meantime, the world was circumnavigated.



But I totally missed the boat on the third group -- sugarcane and breadfruit. Today, we find sugar inexpensive enough to use every day, but it was once considered a luxury. Travelers from the Far East brought sugarcane plants to Europe, but the climate wasn't suitable so the solution was to set up sugarcane plantations in British West Indies. Plantations, however, relied on slave labor. And to feed those all those slaves, it was decided to bring in breadfruit, a large, nutritious fruit, which could be eaten raw or roasted (tasted like bread). In 1775, the West Indian Planters offered huge sums to anyone who could bring live breadfruit trees from Tahiti, even going so far as

building a greenhouse on the ship. Remember the story of Captain Bligh and the "*Mutiny on the Bounty*"? While his second voyage was successful, the slaves refused to eat breadfruit.

One of my favorite foods is number four -- potatoes. They were brought from South America in 1570 and changed the whole farming scene in Ireland. Potatoes could be farmed on very small plots of land, and their harvest could get them through the winter, but in 1846 a fungus destroyed the whole potato crop. The resulting famine was a major impetus for the Irish migration to America.

And the last one -- dead trees. Buried between 345 and 280 million years ago, these trees turned into coal that fueled the Industrial Revolution. Steam engines, iron, steel, illuminating gas, and tar for waterproofing the bottoms of ships were all coal dependent for about 100 years until 1859 when Edwin Drake sank a well into the ground at Titusville, PA and struck oil. But that's another book.

L.A.N.D.S. - Learning Across New Dimensions in Science

By Anne Marie Gross

I remember as a new trainee two years ago, I heard “L.A.N.D.S.” mentioned at every meeting, and it took me a few months before I fully appreciated it for what it is ... one of the best volunteer opportunities we have for packing a powerful punch for science and nature with a group of students who, in my opinion, are at the perfect age for hearing our message.

Sponsored by Texas Wildlife Association (TWA), Learning Across New Dimensions in Science is an education outreach program that helps teachers strengthen their students’ academic skills while engaging them in a broad range of ecology and conservation issues. The program has many components, from intensive teacher training

workshops to providing materials in the classroom to conduct a quail necropsy. Our chapter specifically provides volunteer support for the school field trips, which they refer to as “Field Investigation Days” because they are so much more than a field trip. Students are split into small groups that rotate through five learning stations where volunteers lead

the science investigations and guide students in discussion.

As a new trainee, I tagged along as a helper on one of the L.A.N.D.S. days. I fully expected to see mostly-bored young faces before me, but, wow, was I ever wrong! It is absolutely thrilling to see middle-school and early high-school kids engaged in learning. It didn’t take long for even the most reluctant students to actively participate. It wasn’t more than 20-25 minutes when the horn sounded for the student groups to move to the next station, and we started all over again.

In just one morning, after watching Charlie and Paul repeat the water chemistry experiments with the remaining four groups, I felt sure that I could lead the activities at this or another station the next time. If you haven’t yet volunteered on a L.A.N.D.S. day, I encourage you to just sign-up for one of the spring Field Investigation days listed in the calendar section of this newsletter. There’s always other volunteers to help, and the program coordinators will be sure to pair you up with volunteers who have led the stations before.



Moving On Up

By Eileen Berger

In May 2016, I decided that if I were to continue to visit our beautiful Texas state parks, I really needed to come up with a better type of shelter. Having camped in tents years ago, I enjoyed all the fun of being flooded out by a thunderstorm and did not wish to relive those glory days. I exhausted visiting all the parks that provided screened shelters or cabins. Then came the truck tent, which served me well until I had to replace my aging truck.

And thus began my search for the next logical step in camping. I first investigated different types of small pull-behind trailers that my 4-cylinder engine truck could pull. Pop-ups seemed like a good option, but reviews indicated that it takes at least two people to set one up. "Teardrop" models were popular at the time, but I knew my knees would never be able to handle all the crawling in and out.

After much research, I finally decided that the two most important features for my camping comfort were an inside bathroom and a real bed. I set my budget at \$10,000 and began to search for a small used trailer with those requirements.

Casita makes travel trailers in that size, but even the used ones were beyond my budget. Of course, Airstream does also, but those were completely out of my price range. What was maddening to me was that I could find many large travel trailers – too large for my needs -- that were affordable, but the small ones were more expensive. One Sunday night I found a Forest River R-pod in Fort Worth for \$11,000. I emailed them and went to see it the next day. It was a 2011 model with a slide-out kitchen, queen bed, wet bath, and a table and two benches, so I put a down payment on it and was told to come on Thursday to pick it up. Now let me tell you that I have had a pickup as my main vehicle since 1997, but I had never towed anything. I had watched my husband and son work

with trailers, so I was familiar with hitches, chains, and jacks, but I had never used them. I knew backing up would also be a most daunting challenge, as it takes counter-intuitive reasoning, which always confuses me. However, as my daughter and I always say, "If a man can do it, a woman can do it better!"

I arrived Thursday morning at the Vogt dealership, and explored the features of their classy and pricey Airstream models while they got all the paperwork ready. After all the papers were signed, I waited while they installed a brake controller on my truck and the sway control bar on the tongue of the trailer. It is their policy to not sell a trailer to a person who does not have a vehicle that can pull the trailer. They also require you to purchase a sway bar for short trailers, and a brake-controller for the electric brakes on the trailer. Then I spent two hours being shown all the systems and a short tutorial on driving and backing up.

At 12:30 p.m. I pulled my new camper out of the dealership onto Airport Freeway and headed south to my home near Maypearl, praying all the way. I made it safely, and parked the trailer, unhitched it, and jacked it up so that it was fairly level. So far, so good. I would say that I then went inside and had a stiff drink, except that I don't drink! But if I did, I surely would have. Now, what new parks to visit? It would have to be somewhere close so that I could practice doing all the things I just learned before I promptly forgot them. But that is a story for another time.

[Note from Editor: This is the third in a delightful series of travel tales by Eileen Berger. You can find the first installments in the Jun/Jul 2016 and Feb/Mar 2017 issues of Indian Trail Marker.]

Jun/Jul 2016 --

<http://txmn.org/indiantrail/files/2013/06/ITMNJunJul-2016-News.pdf>

Feb/Mar 2017 --

https://txmn.org/indiantrail/files/2013/06/ITMN_News_2017_1_FebMar.pdf



Fertile Sentiments

By Chris Cook

In 1982 I subscribed to Organic Gardening magazine, back when it was a small newsprint publication that solicited poetry, jokes, and other tidbits from its audience for the next issue. The topic was fertile sentiments, probably in reference to veggie gardening and harvest. I wrote these two poems, somewhat appropriate to the suggested prompt, but a bit tongue in cheek; however, I never sent them in. They surfaced recently as I got started on the dreaded job of cleaning out the file drawers. Hope they give you a bit of a chuckle!



I Only Have Eyes For You

*You are sow radishing;
I yam carrotting for you, my little cabbage.
What I really mint was
I break out in chives and gooseberries
When I bean planting in your row.
Will you string along to my celery
Or do I have to take root in your
heartichoke?
Don't beet around the bush or squash my
spaghettasies.
Wheat a hybrid we could eggplant!
Tomato with you has bean my hoel
existence.
If we cantaloupe I'll pearish on the vine.
Oh, well, enough of this okrap –
I'll truck along with you any way you like.
Lettuce grow!*

Sweet Corn

*Outside her bedroom window
Herb scythed and said in a husky voice,
"I'm chaffing at the bit.
I doughn't know rye I love you sow much.
I barley know you, but I'd walk a mile to
seed you.
Wheat'll we do?"
"Aw shucks," replied Amarantha, as she
planted a kiss on his furrowed brow.
"You're strawng and not sheaftless.
Let's rice to the occasion and get fodder's
blessing.
So we can make hay till the sun shines."*

Chris Cook enjoys making notecards, like the lovely valentine cards shown here, using delicate pressed flowers that she collects throughout the year. If you'd like some tips about starting your own collection of pressed flowers, ask Chris at the next meeting!



MR. WEST'S NEIGHBORHOOD

AS I'M RETIRED AND HAVE THE LUXURY OF A little extra time to do so, I run across more than my share of unusual and hopefully interesting things to photograph. When I have enough worthy photographs, I will share them here. I hope that you will find them interesting as well. Welcome to my neighborhood. Enjoy.



Short-eared Owl



Common Yellowthroat

Red-tailed Hawk (juvenile)



CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

- 2 Mockingbird Nature Park Workday
- 3 BRIT Volunteer Workday (9am-12pm)
- 10 Mockingbird Nature Park Workday
- 14 Valentine's Day
- 15 Plant Family Study Group (6:30 pm)
- 16-18 21st Annual Great Backyard Bird Count
- 16 Kachina Prairie Workday (9am-12pm)
- 19 President's Day
- 20 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Burleson (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 22 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Burleson (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 24 Mayor's Winter Walk, Mockingbird Nature Park (10 am)
- 24 Tree ID Walk, Mockingbird Nature Park (12-1pm)
- 24 Kachina Prairie Workday (9am-12pm)
- 26 Indian Trail Chapter Monthly Meeting (6pm); Program (7pm), BRIT Researcher Dr. Taylor Quedensley, presentation on "Lichens"

MARCH

- 1 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Panther Island Pavilion (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 2 Mockingbird Nature Park Workday
- 3 BRIT Volunteer Workday (9am-12pm)

- 6 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Bear Creek Ranch (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 8 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Panther Island Pavilion (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 10 Mockingbird Nature Park Workday
- 11 Daylight Savings Begins
- 15 Plant Family Study Group (6:30pm)
- 16 Kachina Prairie Volunteer Workday (9am-12pm)
- 17 St. Patrick's Day
- 17 Wildflower Walk, Mockingbird Nature Park (9am)
- 18 Medicinal Wildflower Walk, Mockingbird Nature Park (2pm)
- 20 Vernal Equinox (1st Day of Spring)
- 20 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Panther Island Pavilion (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 22 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Leo Ranch (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 24 Lawn & Garden Expo, Waxahachie (9am-5pm)
- 24 Kachina Prairie Volunteer Workday (9am-12pm)
- 26 Indian Trail Chapter Monthly Meeting (6pm); Program (7pm); artist Walt Davis presenting "Nature Journaling and the Power of Observation"
- 27 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Panther Island Pavilion (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 29 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Panther Island Pavilion (9:30am-1:30pm)



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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John Bunker Sands Wetland Center: Don Happ donnahapp.happ@gmail.com
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Trinity River Audubon Center: Gwen Eishen Gwenieclaire@yahoo.com

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



Monday – February 26, 2018

BIODIVERSITY AND CONSERVATION

**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 Dr. Taylor Quedensley – Research Botanist at Botanical Research Institute of Texas**

Dr. Taylor Quedensley, Research Botanist at the Botanical Research Institute of Texas, will present a fascinating look at lichens, an important group of organisms that play a major role in the biodiversity of most terrestrial ecosystems on every continent. Dr. Quedensley's research is focused on biodiversity and conservation, with emphasis on lichen-forming fungi and molds as they can help us understand how pollution and other factors affect our environment.

Dr. Quedensley earned his Bachelor and Master of Science at University of Nebraska and his PhD in Plant Biology at University of Texas at Austin. Prior to BRIT, Dr. Quedensley was an Assistant Professor of Biology at Georgia College and State University as well as at Missouri Western State University.

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 for the State of Texas.

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