



INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

Apr./May 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

Welcome, Spring!

We have waited patiently through the cold, rainy winter days (more than 11 inches in February, wow!) Now it's time to get outside and see what new adventures spring has in store for us.

Invite your neighbors, friends, and family to join you at a nearby park or wild area to record observations for the City Nature Challenge April 27-30. Have photos of plants or critters you can't identify? Post them on iNaturalist, and you'll have an answer in no time!

Volunteer to help at our Wildflower Walk at the Ellis County Rural Heritage Farm on April 29, or at one of the many Wildflower Walks we lead at Mockingbird Nature Park.

Join us on a L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, where you get to teach and learn at the same time with no papers to grade or homework. Get to know our Navarro county neighbors by volunteering at the Eureka Herb Festival, and share what you love about our chapter activities with those you meet. Then come to our Chapter Social in Corsicana on May 19th.

As someone famous once said, we build our membership with one nature nerd at a time.



Henbit © JimWest

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

CALENDAR

APRIL

- 1-30 Bluebonnet Trails
- 3 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Panther Island (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 5 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Panther Island (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 6 Mockingbird Nature Park Workday, Midlothian (9am-12pm)
- 7 BRIT Workday, Fort Worth (9am-12pm)
- 14 Mockingbird Nature Park Workday, Midlothian (9am-12pm)
- 16 Indian Trail Chapter Board Meeting, Waxahachie (6pm)
- 19 Plant Family Study Group, Waxahachie Parks & Rec (6:30pm)
- 20-22 Bluebonnet Trails Festival, Ennis
- 21 Wildflower Walk, Mockingbird Nature Park, Midlothian (9am)
- 23 Indian Trail Chapter Monthly Meeting, Waxahachie (6pm); Program – “Butterfly Rhythms”, Dale Clark (7pm)
- 24 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Burleson (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 27 Moth Night, Mockingbird Nature Park, Midlothian
- 27-30 City Nature Challenge-DFW (*iNaturalist*)
- 28 Kachina Prairie Workday, Ennis (9am-12pm)
- 29 Ellis County Rural Heritage Farm, Waxahachie (2-4pm)

MAY

- 1 L.A.N.D.S. Field Investigation Day, Granbury (9:30am-1:30pm)
- 4 Mockingbird Nature Park Workday, Midlothian (9am-12pm)
- 5 BRIT Workday, Fort Worth (9am-12pm)
- 12 Eureka Herb Festival, Corsicana (2-4pm)
- 12 Mockingbird Nature Park Workday, Midlothian (9am-12pm)
- 13 Kids Activity, Waxahachie Farmers Market (9am-12pm)
- 13 Mother’s Day
- 17 Plant Family Study Group, Waxahachie Parks & Rec (6:30pm)
- 18 Kachina Prairie Workday, Ennis (9am-12pm)
- 19 Wildflower Walk, Mockingbird Nature Park, Midlothian (9am)
- 19 Chapter Social, Corsicana (12pm)
- 26 Kachina Prairie Workday, Ennis (9am-12pm)
- 28 Memorial Day (*observed*)
- 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)

Did You Know ...

... that praying mantises have a single ear located on the abdomen?

Most members of the order Mantodea have this narrow opening located on the ventral side of the abdomen which can detect ultrasonic frequencies above 20,000 Hz, just above the range of humans. Well camouflaged during the day, mantids take flight at night; their specialized eardrum helps them evade attacks by bats looking for their next meal. Fun fact and mantis photo contributed by Celia Yowell.



Photo by Jonathan Neal, Purdue University College of Agriculture



COMING UP

April Program Speaker: Dale Clark
Monday, April 23rd, 7-8 p

“Butterfly Rhythms: Butterfly population patterns through the year.”

Did you know that more than 175 butterfly species have been recorded in North Texas? Most are in our area year-round, along with emigrant species and the occasional uncommon stray. All the members of these categories follow regular patterns and rhythms, tied to - and influenced by - the environment and time of year. Join us on Monday, April 23rd to learn which are resident species, which are emigrants, which are strays, and hopefully you will leave with a better

understanding of butterfly life history, migration, dispersal and emigration.

About Dale Clark: Fascinated by butterflies and moths since childhood, Dale Clark turned a lifelong passion into a livelihood, quitting his full-time job in 1995 to create Butterflies Unlimited where he raises Texas native butterflies for live butterfly exhibits across the country. He also co-founded the Dallas County Lepidopterists' Society (www.dallasbutterflies.com), a local organization for those who share an interest in butterflies and, from 2006 to 2011, he was the editor of the News of the Lepidopterists' Society, the international news magazine of one of the oldest organizations in existence (est. 1947) devoted to the study of butterflies and moths.



Photo © Jim West



Photos by Carolyn Gritzmaker



★ AWARDS ★

Congratulations to chapter members who received certification and recognition pins for their achievements in volunteer service. In January and February 2018, achievement recognitions were awarded to the following individuals:



*New Certification: Jerome Claud,
Class of 2017*



*2017 Recertification: Rebecca Schumacher, Denise King,
Madeline Kelley, Celia Yowell, Sharon Lane*



*2017
Recertification
and 500 Hours:
Carolyn Ross*



*500 Hours:
Celia Yowell*



*250 Hours:
Dawn Wheeler*

But wait, there's more!

★ AWARDS ★



*2017 Recertification:
Karen Lawton,
George Lawton
(not pictured)*



*2017 Recertification:
Lois Lyon)*

250 Hours: Rena Sutphin



“We salute you, high five!”

MEMBER P | R | O | F | I | L | E

Gwen Eischen

By Jean Kastanek

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

GE: By day I am an Outdoor Educator of sorts. I am currently the DFW Educator for Texas Wildlife



Association. I teach K-8 students the importance of land stewardship, wildlife conservation, and all the nature-nerd facts I can in an hour at a time. I most recently worked for Texas Audubon, starting as an intern in 2015 at Dogwood Canyon and then as Education Manager for Camps at Trinity River until fall of 2017. Prior to that I was an Education Instructor at the Dallas

Zoo, doing overnight programs. I have a degree in Wildlife Conservation from Texas A&M - Commerce. I originally started school in 2007 at UTA for an architecture degree, but my love for nature had me jumping majors until I found the right one seven years later. I have been a dedicated hiker and camper since I was a child. We would spend every weekend we could visiting state and national parks. No one in my family knew much about nature, so my curious young self would spend hours learning about every rock and tree.

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

GE: I wanted to find a group of like-minded individuals that I could share my nature addiction with. I learned of this chapter from co-workers while working at Dogwood Canyon. I enjoy the Mockingbird Nature Park project the most because I used to live in Midlothian and would visit that park as much as possible.

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

GE: I like to learn about all issues, but those that deal with our local ecology and natural resources in DFW get my most attention. I feel that people need a direct emotional attachment to appreciate and support conservation efforts. I try to include current events in my work programs so the audience can understand why we are pushing so hard to address and find solutions to environmental concerns.

JK: What is the most rewarding thing about volunteering?

GE: Sharing the knowledge and seeing the passion in other people. I love being a part of a nature loving community.

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

GE: I try to hike every weekend at local trails or state parks. I have two black labs that love the outdoors, camping, and hiking. I come from a huge family with six siblings. Most are married with kids, so we have social events all the time.

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

GE: I am going to try to visit one new state park a month. Next weekend I am going to Lake Tawakoni.

Dude, look, we're vultures, we got this.



NOTEWORTHY



TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Clever Disguise?

On a recent trip to Tucson, Madeline Kelley reported, "The palm tree is botanically classified as a bush, not a tree. Here in Tucson they become cell towers." One must wonder which is worse, seeing an unadorned cell tower or a 200 ft. "palm tree!" (Fade in music: "One of these things is not like the other...")



A Labor of Love

On a recent walk through her pasture, Deborah Rayfield discovered something interesting, a little rock-covered "hut" no bigger than an 1" tall and wide on an ashe juniper



branch. She could not begin to guess what had constructed it, but knew it had to have wings. iNaturalist came to the rescue with the type of bee that constructs this stand-alone nest, the genus *Dianthidium*, which includes resin bees. Although there are not many photos on the internet, Deborah did find a quote from Bees in Your Backyard about the *Dianthidium* and her nest-building tactics. These resin bees "collect various materials for their nests, including pebbles, soil and resin, taking up to 1000 trips for a female to build a nest." One can see from the photos Deborah took that the pebbles were artfully placed into the native caliche soil. She's not sure where the bee collected the resin, but there are numerous flowers, such as sunflowers, that could have been the source material. Deborah plans to return to the nest later to see if the recent rains have altered it. She has the tree marked with a ribbon so she can find it again.



Playing in the Dirt

On this cold winter morning, Indian Trail Master Naturalists decided it would be much more fun to play in the dirt at the Ruby's workshop. Muffi Ruby, Jake Calvit, Rebecca Mueck, Daniel Mueck, Sandy Ashbrook, Chris Cook, Jean Kastanek, and Celia Yowell made seed balls in preparation for the Mayor's Walk at Mockingbird Nature Park.

continued

NOTEWORTHY



What's in a Name?

At the March 15th Plant Family Study Group, guest speaker and BRIT botanist Dr. Brooke Best led the group on a fast-paced journey from the earliest Latin descriptions of plants (300 BC) to the challenges today's botanists face in applying current rules of nomenclature to the naming (or

re-naming) plant species. All 29 attendees (our group is growing!) then broke into small groups to translate and identify the unique features of more than a dozen plants based on their species names. Dr. Best ended her presentation with a lively, blush-inducing translation of *Dionaea muscipula* (Venus flytrap). Who knew taxonomy could be so ... colorful!



Sidenoteworthy

Whilst we're talking plants, this is a Texas Blue Star. I hadn't seen one in a few years and they're not that easy to find in the first place.

JW



MAYOR'S WALK AT MOCKINGBIRD NATURE PARK



Late winter rains (11" in one week!) might have delayed Midlothian's annual Mayor's Walk, but muddy trails were not going to stop our tireless crew. In the weeks preceding the walk, volunteers spent many days clearing brush, trimming up the Butterfly Garden, and making repairs to make the park look its best for the city's educational and fun annual Mayor's Walk on March 3, 2018. It was a beautiful day with 125 guests and 16 Master Naturalists. Thanks to all who helped make it a special day for the community!

*Photos courtesy of Jean Kastanek and Kathleen Mack
continued*



MAYOR'S WALK *continued*



BLUEBIRD NESTBOX REPORT MOCKINGBIRD NATURE PARK

Report and photos by Deborah Rayfield

This morning, before the deluge, Dan and I went out to Mockingbird Park to work the bluebird boxes. Needless to say, the walking path was very muddy, and this was before the rain came. The parks department



did a wonderful job with mowing the pasture area, so we crossed on the grass to reach the first few boxes. In a few years, if the mowing is kept up, Mockingbird should be a riot of wildflowers!

Box 1, by the north fence: Multiple uses by bluebirds was evident with no dud eggs in the nest. The baffle is down and a huge fire ant mound is around the baffle on the ground. We will fix the baffle to prevent disturbing the nesting birds and also treat the fire ants.

Box 2, by the split in the trail: Wren nest, no dud eggs, fire ant mound at base of pole.

Box 3, open area leading to the pond area: Active Bluebird nest. I removed the old nest, preserving the top layer of new nest and it was replaced back in the box. Two dud eggs were in the older part of the

multilayered nest. Baffle was down and will be repaired.

Box 4, Open area of pasture: Multilayer nest, 4 dud eggs (probably due to late nesting at the end of summer)



Box 5: Lake box: Multilayer nest evident with no dud eggs.

When I use the term “multilayer nest” I mean that I can see evidence of 2 and mostly 3 layers of nesting material. When pulling apart the nest, if no dud eggs are found, high fledge success can be assumed. The best practices of maintaining a bluebird nest box trail would have the boxes monitored all through the season, removing the old nests after the babies have fledged so that the nesting pair can build a new nest for the next clutch of eggs. In our part of Texas, Bluebirds will nest at least twice and most times 3 nests per season. Usually there are 5 eggs each nesting, late summer might have less eggs and the heat has a great impact on nest success.

My conservative estimate for the 4 boxes that were used by bluebirds is between 35- 40 fledged birds! With the mowing of the pastures, there will be even more safe and productive areas for the bluebirds to hunt, leading to even more success in fledges.



MR. WEST'S NEIGHBORHOOD

By Jim West

While running the Trinity River bottoms I was surprised to find a Great Horned Owl sitting on a branch in broad daylight. Even more surprising was the fact that it didn't fly off at my approach or seem the least bit alarmed by my presence. I won't go into it here but I usually get some kind of reaction whenever I show up. Something was wrong as I soon found out when I reviewed the images on my camera. It was missing an eye. I thought about calling Rogers Wildlife but decided I'd wait and see if it was still there in the morning. Thankfully, it was gone. Neither my dog or I found any sign of its demise on the ground below its perch. Not much I could have done anyway as it was about 50 up, and I don't do heights.

I have also been watching this spot where a pair of Kingfishers were taking turns fishing from a tree along the road. They usually bolt when a car went by, so I decided to hang out and see if they would get used to the car. The female did. I spent the next three hours or so sitting in the car, missing a bunch of good shots. I have since gotten some decent photos of them but not the one I wanted of it just coming up out of the water. I did capture this little chestnut as it was beating (tenderizing?) its prey before gulping it down. Stay tuned.



Great Horned Owl

Female Belted Kingfisher



Notable NATURE

Peppergrass

Want to spice up your Spring?

By Gwen Eishen

I like eggs. I like them fried, baked, steamed, boiled, scrambled, poached, and sometimes raw ... for my dogs. As much as I love them, they are not complete without a dash of black pepper. Luckily for me, spring offers an abundant supply of a fresh, native alternative—Peppergrass (*Lepidium virginicum*). This “weed” is part of the Brassicaceae (Mustard Family), along with broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, collards, radish and horseradish. As with all mustards,

it has a tiny four-petal, whitish-yellow flower. Unlike other members of the Brassicaceae which typically have six stamens (four tall, two short), *L. virginicum* only has 2. When the flowers fall off, the flat seed pods are arranged in a

radiating pattern along the stem, described by some as a spiral staircase or bottle brush.

Remarkably, Pliny the Elder (23 AD – August 25, 79 AD), who was a Roman author, naturalist, and natural philosopher, wrote about a “pepperweed” plant in *Naturalis Historia*. About one thousand years before that the Incas were cultivating this plant. The seeds can be used like pepper, added to food when green and fresh or dried and crushed. The young leaves – also peppery in flavor – can be added to salads or soups. The leaves contain protein, iron and are rich in Vitamin C. The flowers can be tossed into a salad with the trimmed roots. This entire plant can be put into a food processor along with turmeric, vinegar, miso, garlic and salt to make a wild mustard condiment. To make a horseradish substitute, collect the roots, wash and crush them, then add vinegar and salt. *L. virginicum* is one of four *Lepidium* species found in the Dallas-Fort Worth area that are similar in appearance; fortunately there are no poisonous look-alikes.

This plant is easy to find nearly year-round in an urban setting along roadsides, fields, ditches, or disturbed sites or in grassy areas along rural roads. Take a walk and spice up for your next meal

Species Profile

Common Names: *Peppergrass*, *Virginia Peppergrass*, *Virginia Pepperweed*, *Poor Man's Pepper*

Scientific Name: *Lepidium virginicum*

Family: *Brassicaceae*

Key Identification Characteristics:

- Short (6-20") plant found in fields or along roadsides
- Linear, lanceolate, or obovate leaves
- Characteristic “bottle brush” flower stalk (raceme) with new flowers at the tip and flat, round green seeds on the lower end



© Deborah Rayfield



© Carl Fabre, 2015

The Triumph of Seeds

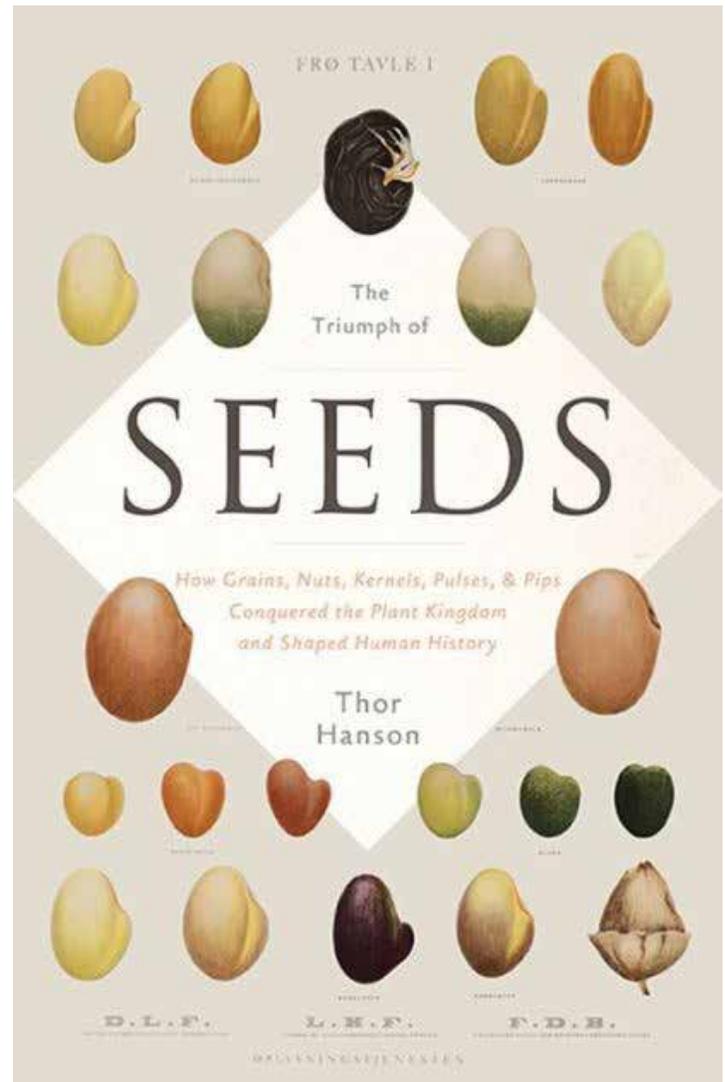
Written by Thor Hanson

Published by Basic Books (2015)

If you are a somewhat seed-y person (what master naturalist is not), then you might enjoy reading *The Triumph of Seeds*, by Thor Hanson. It is not about gardening or purchasing or saving (well, maybe) seeds, but more of a “his”-story book about the history of angiosperms. In Thor’s words: How Grains, Nuts, Kernels, Pulses, & Pips Conquered the Plant Kingdom and Shaped Human History.

It’s easy-reading, an easy chair or bedtime book, and good science all in one. The book is sectioned by actions: Seeds Nourish, Seeds Unite, Seeds Endure, Seeds Defend, Seeds Travel, and it reads like a story, full of information not in your high school world history class. Hanson offers insightful connections between seeds and history such as coffee and the Enlightenment; coffee and cotton and the Industrial Revolution; castor oil, car racing, and the KGB; Columbus and capsaicin; seeds and chemotherapy.

What I like is that I find the book conversational, like a TED talk for the layman, with a few scientific drawings, good quotes, and a bit of family time with his wife Eliza and son Noah. Readers will also find foundational information about seed dormancy, germination, and the myriad of successful ruses by seeds to protect and spread their genes. Appendices are available as well, with chapter notes, taxonomy of all mentioned plants, glossary, and seed saving organizations.



Without preaching, Hanson adds to the idea that we are “all in this together”, as seeds care for their progeny as much as we humans try to do. Now I am looking forward to reading his book, *Feathers: The Evolution of a Natural Miracle*.

“The vegetable life does not content itself with casting from the flower or the tree a single seed, but it fills the air and earth with a prodigality of seeds, that, if thousands perish, thousands may plant themselves, that hundreds may come up, that tens may live to maturity; that, at least one may replace the parent.”

Bluebonnets

ENNIS BLUEBONNET TRAILS

April 1-30, 2018

Throughout April, the city of Ennis showcases over 40 miles of mapped driving Bluebonnet Trails sponsored by the Ennis Garden Club. These trails are the oldest such trails known in the state, and tens of thousands of visitors make the short trek to Ennis to view this wonderful wildflower show. Check for updates on www.bluebonnettrail.org or download the “Ennis Y’All” phone app for an updated GPS enabled trail map that shows where and when the blooms are in peak (available at iTunes or GooglePlay).

ENNIS BLUEBONNET FESTIVAL

April 20-22, 2018

The Indian Trail chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist program is proud to participate in the Ennis Bluebonnet Festival, both at our information booth and offering guided wildflower walks at Kachina Prairie. Visit www.bluebonnettrail.org for festival details.

Photo © Deborah Rayfield

Houston Black Clay, The King of Texas Soils

By Jacob Calvit

Did you know that Texas has an official soil type? When the United States Department of Agriculture first started mapping and classifying soils in the early 1900's, the emphasis was on areas of high agricultural output, such as the land surrounding Houston. Cotton, rice, and sugarcane were all staple crops in that area. As a result, Houston Black Clay was one of the first soils to be classified in the state.

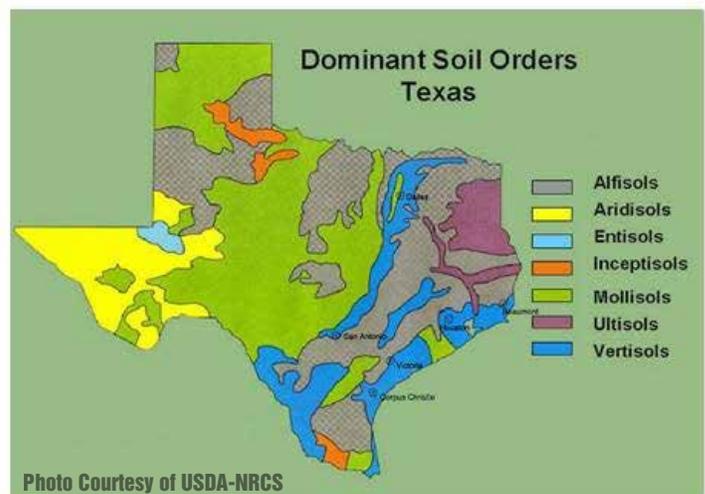
One hundred million years ago, during the Cretaceous period, most of Texas was covered in a shallow ocean. Sediments were deposited that would eventually become limestone and calcareous mudstones. Thousands of years of grassland decomposition resulted in large amounts of organic matter being deposited in the soil. The dense clay prevented much of the organic matter from leaching out of the soil, resulting in its distinctive black color. This soil became the foundation of the blackland prairie, which stretches along the Edwards Plateau into the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Houston Black Clay belongs to a select order of soils known as Vertisols. Vertisols are distinguished by large amounts of the clay mineral montmorillonite, a mineral that has the ability to expand up to 3500 times its size when hydrated with water. During the dry months of summer, the soil will tend to shrink and form large cracks in the surface. These cracks can be almost three feet deep. The addition of topsoil and

organic matter into the cracks, followed by hydration during rainstorms, results in heaving, causing the soil to shift. This heaving and shifting of the soil causes building foundation problems, destruction of tree roots, and a geomorphological feature known as Gilgai, a pockmarked surface.

Despite its limitations, Houston Black Clay helped Texas establish itself as an agricultural giant in the 19th century and has played an integral role in the evolution of the blackland prairie.

Sources used for this article include: USDA; Soil Conservation Service; Texas A&M Experiment Station; Soil Survey of Ellis Co. Series No. 7, 1964; and Jia Liu, Shaoxian Song, Tianxing Chen, Hongliang Li and Yunliang Zhao (2015) Swelling Capacity of Montmorillonite in the Presence of Electrolytic Ions, Journal of Dispersion Science and Technology, 37:3, 380-385





City Nature Challenge 2018: Dallas/fort Worth. Mark your calendars for April 27 - 30! We need your observations!

This year's City Nature Challenge is on April 27 – 30, and we need all naturalists, their friends, and family to participate in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

All observations count, but the most valuable observations are made on public property (parks, right-of-ways, preserves, etc...) and are of wild (non-cultivated/not captive) organisms. Other observations count, of course, but the wild organisms found on public property can influence management and policy.

Wherever you are, record your observations using the iNaturalist app ... just take a picture of a plant or animal, and the community will help identify which species it is. If you are new to iNaturalist or need a refresher on how to use

the app, visit their Getting Started tutorials at www.inaturalist.org/pages/getting+started.

This is a competition among 65 cities in 15 different countries around the world. Can Texas compete? We think so, but we need your help. During the 2017 Challenge, over 24,000 observations were logged in the Dallas-Fort Worth area by 526 people, representing 2,241 species. As Sam Kieschnick reported after last year's City Nature Challenge, this data is evidence of a community that cares about nature and proof that "if a city maintains areas that are good for wildlife, the naturalist community will come and enjoy it."

Help us kick-off the 2018 City Nature Challenge at Moth Night at Mockingbird Nature Park in Midlothian on April 27th from 8-10pm (see the flyer at the end of this newsletter), and let's see if we can beat last year's recorded observations!



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.*



MOTH NIGHT

MOCKINGBIRD NATURE PARK

(1321 Onward Road, Midlothian, TX)

Friday, April 27, 2018

8:00 – 10:00 pm

As part of the City-Nature Citizen Science challenge, we will be documenting some of the critters that live at Mockingbird Nature Park. We will have special moth lights set up to attract, photograph and identify moths and other insects found in the park. Learn about and how to use the Citizen Science tool and app iNaturalist.

Stay only as long as you like, and dress according to the weather.
Bring a flashlight to use on the trail and
a camera or smart phone to document your sightings.

It's Easy, Fun and Free!



For more information about the City-Nature Challenge, visit

<http://citynaturechallenge.org/>

and for our local participation information:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/city-nature-challenge-2018-dallas-fort-worth>

