



INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

News, events & calendar of the Indian Trail Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists...Serving Ellis and Navarro Counties

Nov./Dec. 2018



From the Desk of the **PRESIDENT**

Elaine "Muffi" Ruby

Wow it's been cold since we last met! We find ourselves peaking at December already and where has this year gone.

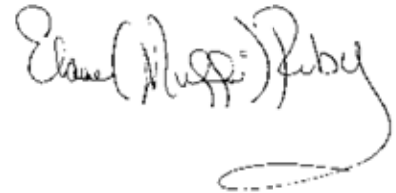
As I am driving, my eyes catch the brilliant reds, golds, auburn and yellow of the leaves against the backdrop of bright, clear, blue skies as the colder weather has changed our views and we enter into autumn and winter.

2018 brought our Indian Trail Master Naturalist chapter new friends with 18 new chapter members joining our ranks. We have worked with Ellis County Heritage Farm, Kachina Prairie, and

Mockingbird Nature Park, where we have met many new people in the community and assisted in their Nature restoration projects. Our new Urban Forestry project has planted trees in almost every community in Ellis and Navarro County. It is the time of year that we begin to build bluebird nest houses in anticipation of next spring.

As we approach the end of 2018 and the exciting beginning of 2019 I hope you have kissed those closest to you and experienced something totally new that has inspired you to expand your horizons!

Looking forward to spending 2019 with All of You.....



Monthly meetings are held on the 4th Monday (usually) of each month at 6 p.m., program at 7 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, Waxahachie. Our office is located in TexasAgrilife at 701 S. I-35E, Suite 3, Waxahachie, TX 75165 | 972-825-5175
Visit our website at <http://txmn.org/indiantrail>



Contribute to the ITMN Newsletter

By Madeline Kelley

Have you ever wanted to tell someone about a nature experience you have had or someone in your family has had or, to share a photo of something of interest? Our newsletter is a perfect way to share your experience and knowledge. Consider contributing from time to time. Send photos, emails, or other documents to one of our newsletter team and we will see that they get included in the next issue of the newsletter. We will be publishing five newsletters a year and will be sending out timely reminders to catch your attention. If you read your email from the newsletter team and feel like it is time to contribute, let us know.

COVER: The Last Sipper(s) A Queen and a Monarch stop by for some much needed nourishment from a Goldenrod, one of the last plants to flower, for their journey ahead.

tag date, gender of the butterfly, and geographic location then tag and release them. At the end of the tagging season, these data are submitted to Monarch Watch and added to our database to be used in research.

WHEN DOES TAGGING BEGIN?

Tagging should begin in early to mid-August north of 45N latitude (e.g., Minneapolis), late August at other locations north of 35N (e.g., Oklahoma City, Fort Smith, Memphis, Charlotte) and in September and early October in areas south of 35N latitude.

PEAK MIGRATION DATES

The following table provides a general guideline for when good numbers of monarchs should be observed at each latitude. These predictions are derived from reports to Monarch Watch, first-hand observations and the records of thousands of tagged butterflies that have been recovered over the years. The migration record at specific locations for any given year may differ from this overall pattern but it has proven to be remarkably consistent when viewed as a large-scale phenomenon.

As mentioned above, this is a general pattern. It is likely to be modified by weather patterns that retard, such as strong southwesterly winds, or advance the migration, such as a series of rapidly moving cold fronts arriving from the northwest. Similarly, the pattern of the migration is likely to be modified along the coasts due to strong head winds or storms that have the effect of sweeping monarchs toward the coast on the backside of fronts.

MIDPOINTS AND PEAKS OF THE MONARCH MIGRATION IN NORTH TEXAS (Dallas is 32.77)

Latitude	Midpoint	Peak abundance
35	2 October	24 Sept. - 6 Oct.
33	7 October	29 Sept. - 11 Oct.
31	12 October	4-16 October
29	18 October	10-22 October
27	23 October	15-27 October
19.4*	18 November	10-22 November

**This latitude represents the general vicinity of the overwintering colonies. The monarch colony at El Rosario (in Mexico) is usually opened to the public around the 18th of November.*

BUTTERFLY NETS

Quality butterfly nets are available from the Monarch Watch Shop (item# 120003; shop.monarchwatch.org or 1-800-780-9986). The

opening of any net should be 12" or more in diameter and the net bag should be at least 24" deep to allow trapping the butterflies in the end of the net without harming them. The mesh should also be small enough that the monarchs aren't able to wiggle free.

CAPTURING A MONARCH

When in flight, monarchs are difficult to catch. It's best to locate monarchs feeding on flowers or in roosts late in the day or early in the morning to maximize your effort. With a butterfly net in hand, approach slowly (from behind if possible), sweep the net forward quickly and flip the end of the net bag over the handle to capture the butterfly deep in the net bag. Collapse the end of the net bag so the wings of the butterfly are closed over its back. Place thumb and forefinger over the leading edge of the wings (from outside of the net) and then reach into the net to firmly grasp the thorax and remove the butterfly for tagging.

STORING LIVE MONARCHS

If more monarchs are collected than can be tagged immediately, they can be stored in a paper triangle or glassine envelope (stamp envelope). To store for more than a few hours, i.e. overnight or up to 2 days, place the envelope in a plastic box or zip lock bag in a refrigerator. The cool temperature will slow their activity. Be sure to keep the butterflies out of the sun before refrigerating them. To keep the butterflies from drying out and dying, place a damp paper towel in the container.

IDENTIFYING THE GENDER OF ADULT MONARCHS

Once you become familiar with monarch adults, determining the gender is relatively easy. Males have an enlarged pouch midway along a vein that is directly below the discal cell on the hindwing. In species closely related to the monarch, this is a source of pheromones used in courtship. The pouches do not appear to be functional in the monarch.

REARED OR WILD MONARCHS?

On the tagging datasheet you have to indicate whether the tagged monarch was Reared or Wild. For tagging data purposes, adult monarchs reared from the egg, larva, or pupa stage should be considered REARED (R) and monarchs captured as adult butterflies should be reported as WILD (W).

Something for Everyone at the Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting



By Charlie Grindstaff

The registration counter is your first stop when you arrive at the Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting and chances are good that I will be there to greet you. Registration is my favorite volunteer opportunity at the Annual Meeting. You will receive a name tag, itinerary booklet of all available sessions with a personalized list of the sessions you signed up to attend, and a gift. In the past the gift has been either a t-shirt, a bag, or a book. This year we received a tote bag loaded with a book and SWAG.

Want to learn something? This year was our 20th Anniversary so the schedule of 152 presentations and field sessions was larger than normal and actually started on Thursday and ended with a prairie walk on Monday. The sessions run the gamut from advanced training to volunteer service activities....identifying frog calls to seed gathering. There were sessions on Chapter administration, setting up trail cameras, land snails, geology, and the dangers drinking straws pose, to name just a few.

Want to take a road trip? There were field trips to watch the bats come out at dusk, to the Gault

Archaeological Site, to Bamberger Ranch, and many more. The instructors/guides include TPWD and AgriLife personnel; Professors from Texas A&M and other colleges; experts from BRIT, International Dark Sky Assn, and Nat'l Wildlife Federation; and members of TXMN chapters.

You can attend as many or as few sessions as you have energy to tackle. You can challenge yourself with classes that make your head spin, for me that was Grass Identification with Dale Kruse, Texas A&M which turned out to be very technical and way over my head. Hopefully it will be offered again next year so I can take it again and hopefully not feel so overwhelmed. Other sessions may be educational but so much fun too, like Educational Impact Two Minutes at a Time with Craig Hensley, TPWD. We went outdoors and made short videos with our cellphones to post on our Chapter Facebook pages.

The good news here is that you are not locked into the sessions you pre-registered for; but may attend almost any other session. The exception being the field trips which have a limit to the number of participants and pre-registrants are always given priority.

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Want to make new friends? While the educational opportunities are seemingly endless, so are the social opportunities, with events each evening, including happy hour and a campfire. I love that every attendee loves nature. It feels like one big family reunion with relatives you only see once a year, but no one talks politics. I must admit this is my favorite part of the Annual Meeting. My goal is to have a friend in every Chapter. Getting close.

Like to shop? My first stop is always the Texas A&M University Press table for books. There is a table selling Master Naturalist shirts, vests, jackets, etc. also. Typically, there are a few other tables selling nature-related items. And then there is the Silent Auction with hundreds of donated items to bid on.

Need inspiration? The many contest exhibits will motivate you. The projects offer some great ideas to take home and adapt. The newsletters and brochures are always good for new ideas. The photography entries are so good it is hard to choose which to vote for.

Want your Chapter Picture taken? There is a backdrop set up for that.

Hungry? Come on, you know it will be "convention" food. You can bet that a chicken entrée will be served for dinner. Breakfast and lunch will be served buffet style and snacks will be put out every afternoon. You won't starve.

Wish the Annual Meeting was closer to home? How about just an hour away? Mark your calendar for October 18-20, 2019 for the Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting in ROCKWALL. I hope you will all join me there.



VIEW FROM MY GARDEN CHAIR

By Chris Cook

Plants of Christmas

When I think of Christmas traditions, my mind instantly goes back to two things from my childhood--being part of a living creche in my neighborhood and being allowed to put the silver tinsel on the tree. Yes, I am aware that both of those experiences date me, and I am so happy to have had them! I realized when it was time to decorate for the holiday that so many of our traditions for Christmas involve plants, historically, religiously, nationally, and intimately.

There are pagan customs adapted to early Christianity, hiding their initial origin and giving them new meanings. Many of the plants of Christmas harken back to pagan times and rites. Holly was the sacred plant of the Roman god Saturn who as celebrated in the festival of Saturnalia; the Romans gave each other wreaths of holly. Christians who did not want to be persecuted would place holly wreaths on their houses. As Christianity became more popular, the holly branch and berries came to symbolize peace and joy, and people often settled disputes under a holly tree. Holly was also placed with beehives in the belief that bees hummed in honor of the infant Jesus; some also believed holly protected the house from lightning.

Thus, we now sing “deck the halls with boughs of holly” as one of our favorite holiday songs.

From the Christmas carol “The Holly and the Ivy”, another plant of pagan times was the symbol of Bacchus the Roman god of wine and revelry, and much partying was done by those Romans at Saturnalia, which occurred at about the same time as Christ’s birth. Ivy is a lesser plant of Christmas in the USA, being more popular in Europe, especially in England.

Those Romans celebrated festivals and sports

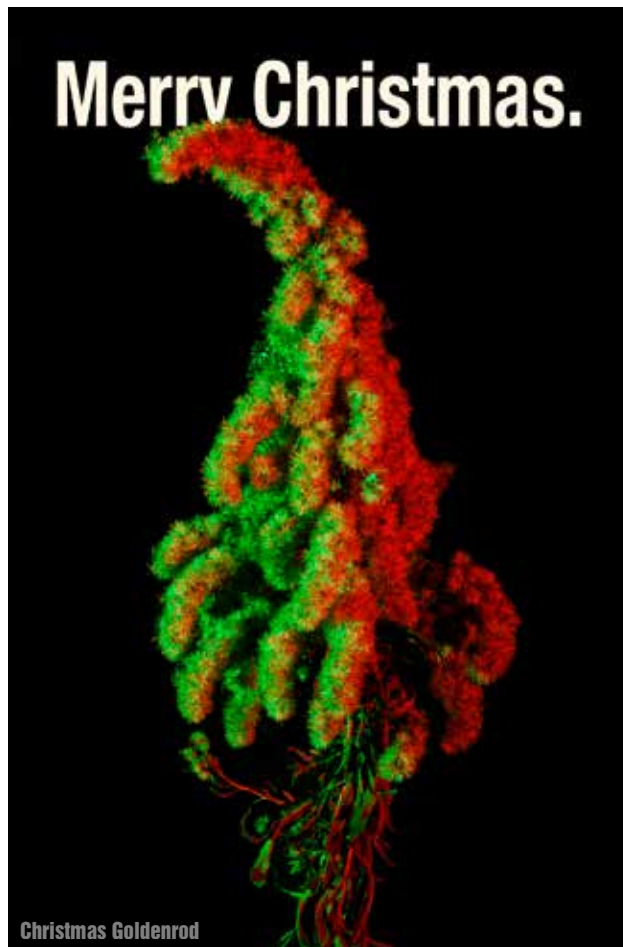
competitions with wreaths made of laurel, bay and rosemary given to friends, and to those who were in power, or who won events. Sometimes these were worn on the head, but then decorated the walls of buildings. As the Romans had outposts all over their empire, where laurel was not available, other green winter plants were substituted, resulting in our tradition of using evergreens to make and hang wreaths to celebrate the holiday.

Another plant revered in pre-Christian times by the Celts, the Norse, and even by North American Native Peoples, is mistletoe. Especially sacred to the Druid priests, no parts of the plant were permitted to touch

the ground during harvesting. Branches were caught or were lowered with golden sickles onto groundsheets to preserve the plant’s power. Pieces were then given to members as a symbol of peace and joy and as a protection against evil, enemies, thunder, and lightning. Our tradition of kissing under the mistletoe comes from the idea that discord is removed under the mistletoe, as in that culture enemies were required to meet under the mistletoe, put down their weapons and negotiate so that peace, and therefore joy would reign.

The Winter Solstice, a time when daylight began to increase, was a celebration of the coming of light to the darkness. The Oak King was considered to be powerful from Winter until Spring. In

the tradition of the yule log, a huge oak log was lit, decorated with evergreens, sometimes with flour. Often bits of the previous yule log were also burned as continuity for the annual return of light. In Christian times, the yule log fire represented Christ’s coming as the light of the world. The prevalence of red and green is related to the wintertime, as in our European heritage, berries and evergreens were available at the Winter Solstice; in Christian times, red represented Christ’s blood and evergreens reminded that Christ is ever-present.



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View continued

In most countries, those who celebrate Christmas make use of those plants which are available in late December in their particular climate, or plants are grown indoors for purchase. The decorating of a Christmas tree, both indoors and outdoors, predominates in North America and other areas initially settled by northern Europeans. In my childhood in Ohio, the most favored and fragrant tree was the balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*), native to Canada. Moving from there to Big Spring, Texas in early marriage, I found no balsams. However, we usually left for family visits, and our December decorated "tree" was a tumbleweed hung with ornaments--widely available, free for the taking, and never far to find! Many people there also put colored ornaments on the needle-like ends of their agave plants. Other popular trees are pines (*Pinus*), and spruces (*Picea*). Some decorate with non-evergreen trees that might be locally available, such as birches and aspens which are admired for their bark. In our north central Texas area, one of the best choices for lasting through the holidays without losing needles is the Frasier fir (*Abies fraseri*). This species is native to the southern Appalachians, but is considered endangered in the wild due to factors such as climate change, insect damage, and urban spread. The scientific name honors John Fraser, a Scots botanist who explored these mountains in the late 18th century.

And I must not fail to mention one of the most iconic Christmas plants of all--the poinsettia. Scientifically, this plant is a member of the spurge family, and its name is *Euphorbia pulcherrima*. Its common name comes from Joel Roberts Poinsett, the

first United States Minister to Mexico., who brought the plant to the USA in 1825. This plant is especially known and used for its red and green foliage, although it now can be propagated to produce varieties in other colors and color mixtures, especially in pink, in stripes, and in white. The colors can be changed by varying the amount of time the plant is held in darkness. The brightly colored parts of the plant are not flowers but bracts, which are leaf-like structures. The small yellowish tiny structures at the center are the actual flowers. Poinsettias are native to Mexico. The Aztecs used it for a red dye and for medicine. In Mexico it is known as Flor de Noche Buena, or Christmas Eve Flower. In Spain it is known as Flor de Pascua, or Easter Flower, and in Chile and Peru it is known as Crown of the Andes. As the story goes, in 16th century Mexico, a young girl was too poor to bring a gift to celebrate Jesus' birth. An angel told her to gather some weeds and place them in front of the church altar. Red blossoms sprouted from the weeds and became poinsettias. The star shaped leaf symbolizes the Star of Bethlehem, and the red color represents Christ's blood at the crucifixion.

As for the maybe forgotten plants of that first Christmas, the birth of Christ, maybe they are the rosemary and lavender bushes said to be prevalent for Mary to lay out her cloak upon to dry, and the hay and other grasses and flowers of the field, filling the manger upon which the Christ Child was swaddled and laid, the first and most important creche of all, the most humble, useful, and enduring of Christmas plants.

Kids, History and Nature

By Madeline Kelley

Recently my husband and I took a short trip to San Antonio to check out some vacation interests. Although both of us had been in San Antonio many times for family visits, conferences and work, we had never toured the missions, other than the Alamo. So, we decided to check out this part of Texas history.

The day we went to the San Jose Mission there were busloads of middle school teachers and kids running around the missions. Some were enjoying the missions and the stories being told by their teachers. However, there were many who were not so focused on the history education and were far more interested in nature observations such as the furry little creature hanging to a tree (see picture). The boys were oohing

and aahing when I walked up to snap a shot. I naturalist has not identified it yet. Does anyone know what it is? Looks pretty scary. The boys and I had a discussion about an asp sting my son had when he was five. The boys then declined to handle the little caterpillar. The boys may not have had a history lesson that day, but they did get a nature lesson.....so I guess all is well.



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

Jim West

By Madeline Kelley

MK: Tell us a little bit more about your life outside of Texas Master Naturalist and what activities do you enjoy when you're not busy with chapter programs?

JW: When I'm not naturalizing, I can usually be found at home fixing something or designing something for

someone on the computer. When that doesn't work, I pack up my dog and cameras and head down to the river bottoms to see what I can find. I also shoot pool in a league a couple of times a week. I'm not half bad, I must say, the benefits of a misspent youth. Weekends there are museums and gallery openings.

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

JW: I was at the John Bunker Sands wetland where, little did I know at the time, I was about to become a steward. I met a guy on the boardwalk, we had a conversation and he suggested that I should look into becoming a

master naturalist. The rest, as they say, is history. I enjoy designing articles and using photos to tell a story for the newsletter as I was a graphic designer in my previous life.

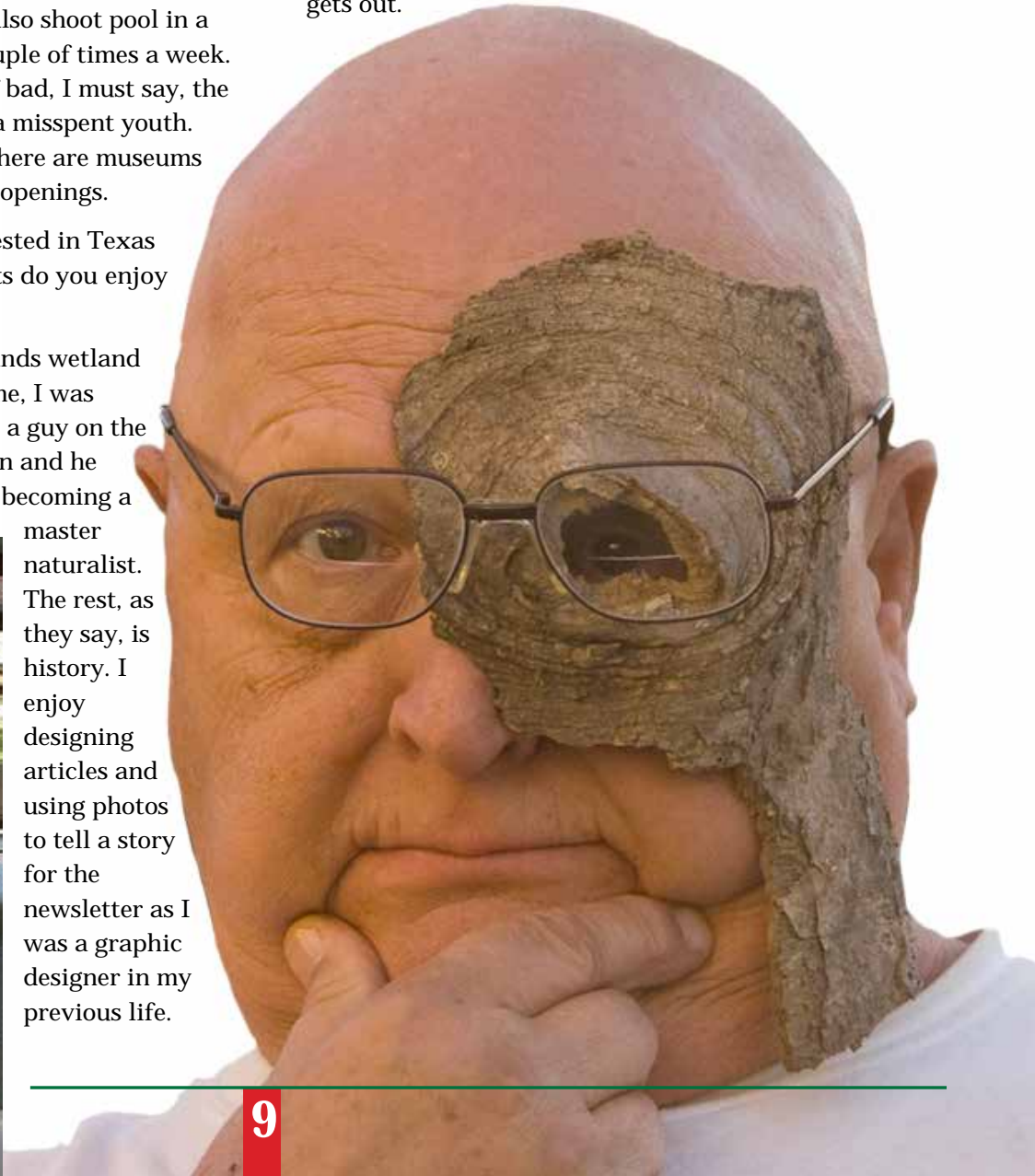
Many of our chapter's projects are too far from home for me unless I find someone to car pool with. I do need to start helping out at Kachina.

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

JW: The most important issues to me are habitat loss, extinction and overpopulation. I hope that in some way, the I can have a bit of a positive impact on these problems.

MK: What is the most rewarding thing about volunteering?

JW: For ITMN, it's hoping that our message gets out.



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.*