



INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

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

ISSUE 12021

From the Desk of the **PRESIDENT**

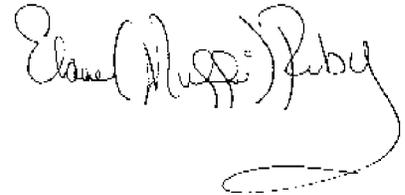
Elaine "Muffi" Ruby

AFTER A HORRIBLE FREEZE, WE ARE RECOVERING AND watching for the next several weeks to see if our plants, bird friends, etc. survived and are hardy enough to stick their tongues out and say see I survived- that is what TEXAS does – survive!!!

This is our first Newsletter of 2021. Exciting that we have a new year where we hope to have many face to face activities and events. Vaccines are

reaching more people everyday. I am planning, with hope, that the facemasks will be going away!!!!

We are planning to have a 2021 new members class – not sure if it will be a hybrid- with a combination of face to face and virtual -But we are having a class – Yea!!!!



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>

PHOTO SUBMISSIONS

Yes, please. When you submit your photos to us for publication, please do not embed the photos within an email or a doc, as I have no way to extract them. Attach them. The proverbial piece of cake. Also, if you are shooting with your phone, set it to the highest quality or largest file size setting. Any questions, you know how to find me. Blast away. Thank you, *JW*



COVER: Horned Lark A year-round resident, they're nearly impossible to spot in the plowed fields that they prefer. Pleasant and tame, the horns, actually small projecting feathers, become more prominent as breeding season nears.

Solace in the Suburbs

By Jessica Willis

2020 has been an unexpected year. Thinking back to just a few short months ago, our lives all looked very different.

Living near the buzzing metropolis of Dallas-Ft. Worth our lives as a family were busy, with a city like ours there was never shortage of things to do. The question each weekend was around the number of activities we could accomplish. But this year we are experiencing an unprecedented time (at least for my lifetime), a shutdown of epic proportions for our safety and for those around us.

It has been a time of slow down and a chance for many to turn to the outdoors. Many are pulling out their bikes and dusting off those walking shoes looking for ways to spend active time outside. For me this meant spending time a short drive from my home in Mockingbird Park.

I have been to this little park more times in the past few months than in the previous 5 years since moving from the Hill Country to North Texas, and it has charmed me.

The park was donated to the city of Midlothian by the Holcium Corp. in 2008, it has been one of the Indian Trail Chapters projects since 2010 and though I imagine it had been worked as farm land it is being returned to a state of prairie and riparian environment.

I enjoy waking in the park because I can usually get a few miles in without even noticing. This year I've had the pleasure of watching the park change and

cycle through different spring time blooms and then watch as those blooms turn to seed. The process is beautiful. It causes me to reflect on my own life and how it is so special to be surrounded by so many living things singing their own songs.

When walking through the park slight road noise can be heard, but the constant breeze whispering through the prairie draws you in with its earthy scent and as you walk deeper into the park, in the first grove of trees you can start to forget about the outside world and instead start to focus on the more local noises like the twiddling of birds and chirp, chirp, chirp warning call of a nearby hidden bird, possibly a cardinal. Grasshoppers bouncing out of the way with each step. Next, we come to a prairie with a water tank. In March the park had a lovely showing of bluebonnets, then in April it filled with the most beautiful red firewheels and yellow black eyed susans that have since given way to basket flowers, bee balm, and Indian blankets in May.

Distractions on each side of the trail, flowers, bees in them, a caterpillar munching on leaves, and then a swift dragonfly skims by. Following the loop down a slight incline and to a hidden boardwalk in a grove of tall trees. This spring we had a lot of rain so this area was often filled with trickling water and the sound of a woodpecker heard perhaps making a home in one of the dead trees. After looping through the cedar meadow in the back we make our way back to the front of the park, out of the solace and back to reality.

How lucky I am to have a place such as this!

Field Crescent Butterfly



FEED THE BIRDS

By Jennifer Zarate

Unlike years past, we were unable to gather in a large group and travel together to each park. This year we made the best of it and created a socially distanced “non-event” event which was held Saturday, January 30th. Participants were encouraged to make bird treats at home and bring them to their selected park.

Laura Beattie helped at Kachina Prairie, Jessica Willis at Mockingbird park and myself at Bullard Heights. The weather was chilly and overcast with scattered showers in the morning but we are naturalist and enjoyed the weather anyway. The sunshine showed up later in the morning and was fantastic. The group at Bullard Heights wanted to stay and enjoy the nice weather and spent some time picking up a few large bags of trash. Several members showed up at each park to help hang treats.

A few folks decided to hang treats the following day with clear skies. Despite the challenges this year, many treats were hung making for lots of happy birds. While we were unable to gather for lunch this year we can look forward to that again in 2022!



Howdy from the Prairie!

The Prairie has a much different look than what it did for the “Feed the Birds” day. On Friday, 5 Feb, the City Parks and Rec crew completed the dormant season mowing. They did a good job and the Prairie looks really great. Other than in the trail, I didn’t see many bluebonnet plants. Maybe a little early this year. It will be interesting to see what else pops up and when.

The City’s “Keep Ennis Beautiful” group hung the “Adopt -A-Park” sign on the entrance gate during our COVID-19 absence.

Maintenance items over the next few weeks are as follows:

1. Installation of bluebird nest boxes. along the east property line. Anyone interested in taking ownership/maintenance/monitoring of these houses, please step forward.

2. Leveling of the ruts left from last year’s dormant season mowing -West section or the trail.
3. Installation of a bat house along the west side trail. Again, anyone interested in adopting this house?
4. Installing fresh mulch at the kiosk, trail markers, benches, “Ben”.
5. Replace missing bollard at entrance gate.
6. Push back of the brush line along the trail
 - a. South trail section
 - b. Wooded trail section

Looking forward to the spring warmup.

Jim Patak,
Kachina Prairie Project Chair



Taking Care of You and Your Family's Mental Health Through Nature

By Madeline Kelley

I volunteer for another organization who educates and provides support to families who have someone in their family with a mental health diagnosis. In our support groups and classes I hear lots of stories from family members about how difficult these times (pandemic) have been for their loved ones with a diagnosis, especially those with young adults in their families. It started me thinking about the role of nature in my life and how healing it can be to “walk in the woods or prairie”. So, I started doing some research on this topic of nature providing healing,

especially in these times, for those with a mental health condition.

There are many articles showing the research that has been done to support the notion that being in nature is good for our mental health. I chose one of the easier reading ones and the link is below if you want to read further. I think you will find it enjoyable and will support your desire to go out and make yourself and your family have a good time being mentally healthy like the little fellow in the green shirt.

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature>

EATING WILDLY

By Pam and Joe Mundo

DANDELION SALAD. Spring is here in Texas and the dandelion picking is wonderful-young and tender, before the plant blooms. Now is the time to go out into the lawn (before Chemlawn comes or other chemical company) or in a stream riparian area or field and hunt for dandelions. They do make a wonderful green salad. Pick them when they are tiny and young. Pick them before they bloom. Those big dandelion leaves at Wholefoods or Tom Thumb are tough and awful. The fields and lawns are available for free picking and the salad is good for you.

Pick the greens-whole plant at it root. Bring home and soak in cool salt water-Kills any hidden bugs. Rinse, put in bowl with your favorite salad fixins and add a dressing. I just use cucumbers or celery, raw

garlic, salt and pepper, olive oil and wine vinegar and sliced hard boiled eggs. There's nothing better than a nice dandelion salad.





MR. WEST'S NEIGHBORHOOD

By Jim West

Year-round residents, Yellow-rumped Warblers brighten up considerably come spring. You've probably seen them at your feeder. My area is inundated with them. If they have a song, and I assume they do, as they are, after all, warblers, I've never heard it that I know of. Smaller than a sparrow, they're fairly tame and easy to photograph. Who knows, they may even do a pirouette for you.



Birdlists

By Christine Cook

Most of us in ITMN (and otherwise) enjoy seeing birds. Many of us like to try to identify them. A few of us can identify many. A select few can identify then by bird call/song. Then there are those of us who repeatedly go on what we call birdie rides to see what we can see, like my daughter, Karina Jones, and I do. On our rides going southeast of Ennis in Ellis County we list what birds we can see and identify, and often add in what wildflowers and other wild animals we spot. We are usually gone two or more hours. You may have seen some of our lists posted on social media, hoping to encourage others to explore.

Here in Ennis, at Kachina Prairie, there are many birds to hear, and some to see, although it's easier to identify them when they are on a wire or fencepost or floating in a pond than when they're deep in the trees.

However, let me introduce you to Rel Lipscomb. Rel lives in Ennis, but he is the manager of a Wild Birds store in Dallas. He is also a bird seeker and a list keeper, and a real pro at identifying the birds he sees and hears. He often walks Kachina Prairie, and notes the birds he finds. Check out the list he kept from a morning walk a few weeks ago. He told us this list was compiled in less than an hour. I asked Rel if he would be a speaker for one of our meetings; he said he is a face to face guy and would be happy to be with us when we can all be together again. I continue to hope that will be sooner rather than later, duh.

Field Observations: 1/9/2021 Lake Clark & Kachina Prairie Clear, Sunny, Cool

Gadwall	Ring-billed Gull	White-throated Sparrow
Northern Shoveler	Forster's Tern	Northern Cardinal
Lesser Scaup	White-Winged Dove	Common Grackle
Piebilled Grebe	Mourning Dove	Purple Finch
Anhinga	Red Bellied Woodpecker	Pine Siskin
Double Breasted Cormorant	Northern Flicker	American Goldfinch
Great Blue Heron	Blue Jay	Northern Mockingbird
Great Egret	American Crow	American Pipit
Turkey Vulture	Eastern Phoebe	Orange-crowned Warbler
Black Vulture	Carolina Chickadee	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Sharp Skinned Hawk	Carolina Wren	Field Sparrow
Red Shouldered Hawk	Sedge Wren	Le Conte's Sparrow
Red tailed Hawk	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Song Sparrow
American Coot	Hermit Thrush	Lincolns Sparrow
Killdeer	American Robin	Swamp Sparrow
American Woodcock	Harris's Sparrow	Dark-eyed Junco

REVIEW

NOTEWORTHY WATCHING

There have been a lot of comments going around about a must-see documentary, *My Octopus Teacher*. Well, they were correct, if understated. It's one of the most enlightening and interesting pieces I've ever seen.

The story centers about a guy with a case of burnout taking a break to look for another path. He didn't have to go far to enter a whole new world.

It centers on South African documentary filmmaker and diver, Craig Foster and the relationship

he develops with a female octopus living in the kelp forest where he dives every day. If the story itself isn't enough, the setting is amazing. He lives above a quiet cove on the most violent coast on the Atlantic ocean.

He doesn't anthropomorphize her, as it would only have spoiled it and, that's about as close as I'll get to giving any more away except that if this doesn't awe you, have someone check your pulse. I will add that it's on Netflix and it has won a number of awards. *JW* Here's a link.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3s0LTDhqe5A>

NATURAL reads

Book review by Charlie Grindstaff

What It Is And Where It Lives Marianne Taylor, Author and Illustrator

Michael O'Mara Books Limited 2014

I needed this book back in 2010 when I was taking the Master Naturalist training....it is basically the Cliff Notes for the Texas Master Naturalist manual (with quirky humor) in only 185 pages. I seem to remember some chapters of our manual were each longer than that. There is no mention of anything Texan in this wonderful book though, hmmm? I suppose that is because it is about British nature, but don't let that deter you. It is definitely the best refresher course you will find about all the basics we should have learned and have possibly forgotten. The author's stated purpose is to show how plants and animals interact and form ecosystems that function.

The book is divided into three sections, Flora, Fauna, and Planet Earth. Ms. Taylor devotes one page to Taxonomy basics but uses common names throughout the book, easy to read. Her beautiful line drawings help clarify details and enchant the reader.

"Scientific names aren't always Latin. There's a clam called *Abra cadabra* – disappointingly it's not magic." Flora is divided into chapters on Trees, Flowers, and Fungi. These are exactly what you would expect. I am not a big fan of, nor very knowledgeable about fungi; so, I was pleased to read that "these weird plant-fungus combos are well-known indicators of air quality: lots of lichens mean good, clean air". When I finish this review, I will head out to our woods to find some clean air.

"Some species, including the yew, can grow as a tree or a shrub. Maybe we should call them trubs, or shrees".

"Just so you know, monkey orchids aren't pollinated by monkeys, and military orchids are not pollinated by soldiers, either."

Fauna is divided into Mammals, Birds, Reptiles and Amphibians, Fish, and Insects and Other Invertebrates. Again, these chapters are exactly the review that you would expect and probably need. I learned that Britain has only 6 native species of reptiles (3 snakes, 3 lizards) and amphibians (1 frog, 2 toads and 3 newts). No native tortoises, crocodiles, or salamanders. Of course, there are many introduced species. Taylor reminds us that bird-watching is much easier than other-watching because "mammals are too shy; reptiles and amphibians are hiding under things and insects are mostly too small. But birds, with their power of flight, can flaunt themselves in front of us to a greater extent". "Got milk? Then you're a mammal."

The explanation for why birds sing is fun..."the same reason that fools fall in love...it's hormones". A male bird hears the song as meaning this is my territory, go away or we will fight; but a female bird hears I am a wonderful male to have this great territory, wanna join me?

The author reminds us that nature works like a pyramid. If the bottom layer (plant life basically that gets its resources from the sun and soil) is big enough there will be another layer (animals that eat plants) which again, if big enough will support another layer (predators). Each layer is controlled by the layer below, a decline in prey triggers a decline in predators. The system is self-regulating. "So, if you see sparrowhawks hunting the little birds in your garden, don't be too downhearted about it – the presence of top predators is a good sign that everything else further down the food chain is doing well".

Something I don't remember learning in TXMN training is that there are probably more species of fish than there are mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians put together. As Taylor points out, we have more open water than dry land which may account for that. But while there are over 30,000 species of fish, they pretty much "lack imagination" and most can be identified as fish by their smoothly



continued from previous page

streamlined body, paired fins on the underside, tail fin, and pair of gills.

The last section, Planet Earth, divided into Ecology, Outside Influences and Earth's Neighbors was also a review, but also educational and a warning. Everything mentioned in the previous chapters "form a web of life, eating each other, living on or in each other, competing, co-operating and generally coexisting in something approaching harmony. This is ecology – the way living species fit together to form an ecosystem." She explores weather, wind, climate, volcanoes, seasons, moons, gravity, planets, and more. "Wind is formed when you eat baked beans. The other kind of wind is formed when dense air meets less dense air, causing the former to rush into the latter."

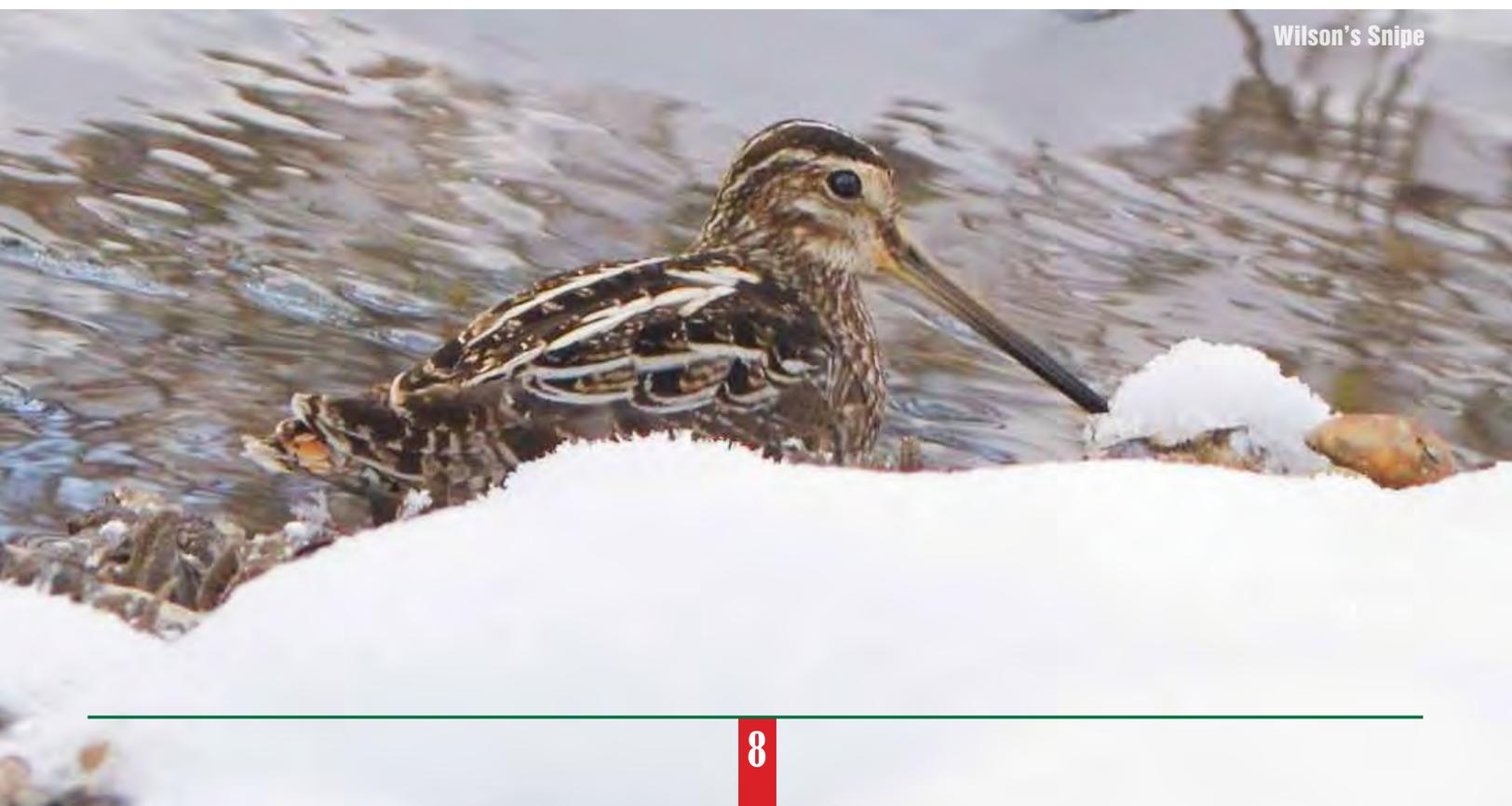
I want to end with Marianne Taylor's words, reproduced here with permission of the publisher: "Introduced animals represent the thing that an ecosystem often can't deal with – sudden and major change. Dramatically modifying habitats by building motorways through them is another example of the same thing. Ditto pollution, global warming, land drainage and many other things we do to make the world suit our needs better. Ecosystems survive the same way species do – by evolving. In every generation, only the best-adapted individuals of each species will survive, and will pass on those good genes to their offspring. Variety is provided by the genetic mutations that make the young a little bit different to

their parents. It's a beautifully simple and stable process that enables species to accommodate change – but it takes a long time. If the change is too fast, species start to disappear, and too much of that cripples the ecosystem.

That's why ecology matters, and it's not just a philosophical matter – we are involved, intimately, and our own future is at stake. The loss of the tiger from the earth would be a terrible tragedy, but the loss of the honeybee and other pollinating insects would be a total catastrophe: our crops would fail and millions would die. There's no getting away from it: we need animals and plants for more than just something to admire and go all dreamy about.

The richer an ecosystem, the more species it contains, the more resilient it is to change – the more room for manoeuvre it has. And ultimately all ecosystems are connected. Therefore, it's in our interests to look out for wildlife, in both senses of the phrase, and champion it for our own sakes. We might still have to pack up and leave the earth one day anyway – Stephen Hawking thinks so and he knows a thing or two – but we'd be hard-pressed to find another planet as wonderful as this one."

This is a long review for a short book. I hope I have tempted you to find a copy to read or to give to someone to introduce them to our wonderful world of nature.



Wilson's Snipe

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

Elaine "Muffi" Ruby

By Lois Larson Lyon

LLL: What do you do outside of ITMN:
I am always working outside in my yard – cleaning or establishing new plantings. We are blessed to have the best of two very different areas of Texas. East Texas farm with 10 inches more rain annually and very different soil than Ellis /Navarro soils. I'm always learning – I think this helps keep Alzheimer's disease far away. I have been retired since 2016 and it took me about a year to adjust to not being in the "work" environment. I miss the social aspect of working but I have made myself busy in many ways. I love to sew and I'm learning – slowly- to quilt. I am also a volunteer with the Master Gardeners, but my real love is being a Naturalist and protecting and sustaining what nature provides for us. We have an RV which we love to travel in with our German shepherd. We have been to Oregon and love the Northwest, but our family is here in Texas. I love to walk and it helps to keep me healthy!

LLL: How did you become interested in Texas Master Naturalist?

ER: I have always loved Nature and being outside. I wanted to find a program that would let me enjoy nature and learn about bluebirds, native plants, apps that help identify things in nature, and find people with similar interests and who love all parts of nature. I have met so many people who are so very talented and knowledgeable. Master Naturalists love to teach and share what we learn with anyone who's interested.



LLL: What projects do you enjoy the most?

ER: I love taking care of Mockingbird Park and Kachina Prairie, and now we are starting to work at Bullard Heights. We are so blessed to have people who love these areas and are willing to be in charge to take care of and maintain these areas and educate the public. 2020 was my first year to be involved with Monarch tagging- I loved it and it was so easy. My backyard in Ellis county was a magnet for the Monarchs. I enjoy hanging bird treats in January. Learning something new every day is a "fabulous" for me!

LLL: What nature/environmental issues interest you the most or you find the most rewarding?

ER: Planting ONLY Native plants is very important to me and providing and maintaining our small habitats for the survival of bees, insects, butterflies, and birds. Continued learning is important – my newest thing is to collect and dry plants for BRIT. I am also beginning to learn more about identifying birds.

I'm so very fascinated by trees and by learning about their care and maintenance and how very important trees are to our survival. I have been asked to join a watershed planning group for Joe Pool Lake area and I am excited to be involved in how we plan for the future to protect our local watershed!! Being part of this group has been very rewarding in everyway!!!! Thanks for letting me be a part of the Indian Trail Chapter.



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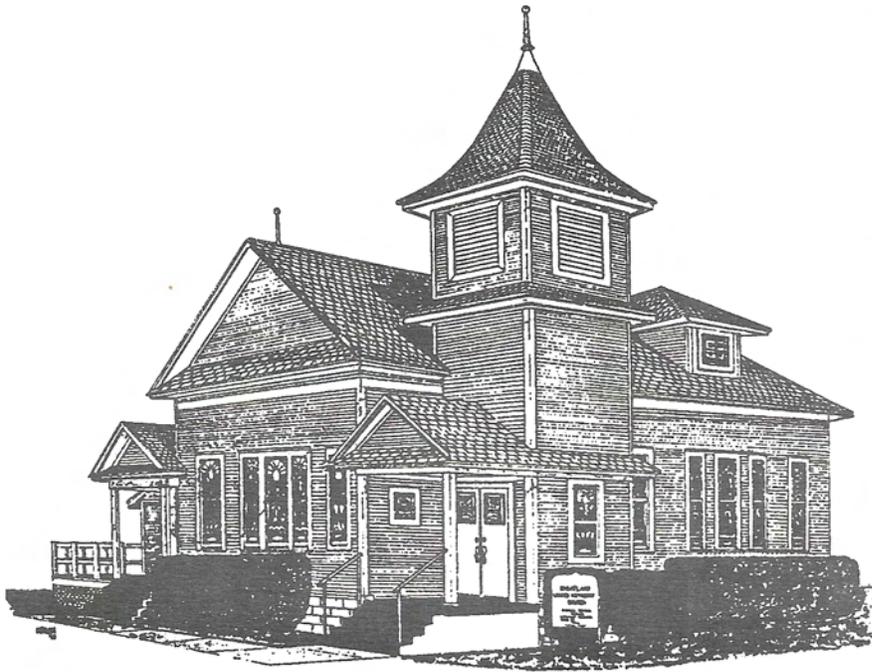
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The mission of this newsletter is to inform, educate and entertain Texas Master Naturalists and their circle of friends.



WHEATLAND UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Founded in 1847, one year after Texas joined the United States, it is known as the oldest Methodist church west of the Trinity River. Built on its present site in 1859, the building was enlarged in 1912, when steeple and stained glass windows were added. The church was recorded as a Texas Historic Landmark in 1965.

The Feed Bag

By Lois Lyon

Estrada

This is a great hot breakfast casserole that you can make the night before, refrigerate and pop into the oven when you get up. It's ready to eat in 1 hr. piping hot and delicious! Crush your cornflakes the night before also and keep in a zip-lock.

Slices thin sandwich bread	2 Tbsp. Dry mustard
4 cups cubed ham	1 c. melted butter
½ lb. American cheese slices	2 c. skim milk
6 eggs	1 to 1-½ c. crushed cornflakes

Spray or grease lightly a 9 x 13" glass casserole dish. Line the bottom with slices of sandwich bread & put as many as possible to cover the bottom in a single layer. Add a layer of cubed ham and a layer of American cheese slices, again covering but not overlapping. Place another layer of bread on the top. Beat the eggs, dry mustard, melted butter and milk together. Pour over the ingredients in the dish. Cover and refrigerate overnight. When ready to bake, sprinkle with crushed cornflakes. Bake 1 hr. at 325°. (About 1½ lbs. Boneless ham = 4 cups.)

Coachman's Inn Spinach Salad

This salad was brought to our quarterly Church Family Dinners at a lovely New England style church, Wheatland United Methodist, near I-20 in S. Dallas. The church is still there, and was recorded as a Texas Historic Landmark in 1965. Luckily, my dear friend, "Bobbie" put the recipe in the 1992 cookbook that our church put together, and I had the joy of helping with. It's another "make-ahead" side dish, that is healthy also.

1 Bunch fresh spinach, stemmed and rinsed ¾ c. fried bacon, crumbled, or use
2 Hard boiled eggs, diced Bac-Os sprinkled on instead

Toss together ingredients in salad bowl. Pour pre-made dressing over salad and serve. Dressing should be made a day ahead for proper melding of flavors. Refrigerate any leftover dressing.

Dressing

½ c. salad oil 1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
¾ c. granulated sugar 1 medium onion, minced, or 1 Tbsp.
¼ c. white vinegar instant onion instead
1/3 c. ketchup

Combine all ingredients in a glass jar. Shake well and refrigerate overnight to blend.

Borrowed from an old friend.....Lois E. Lyon