

Holiday Gifts to Help Spread the Love of Nature

I am always looking for ways to help people connect with Nature, and giving them books on the subject seems like a really good way to do that. And of course, we all like to give ourselves gifts sometimes too. Here are some suggestions of books for you as well as your friends and relatives that might help with your holiday shopping.

For pure enjoyment and inspiration I would suggest everyone should read "A Sand County Almanac" by Aldo Leopold. I would put this book at the top of my list. Leopold has been called the father of wildlife management, and America's greatest naturalist whose work should be placed alongside that of Henry David Thoreau and John Muir.

Other inspiring books include Texas author Roy Bedichek's (sometimes called the Texas Leopold) "Adventures with a Texas Naturalist", and another Texas author John Graves' "Goodbye to a River" and "Hard Scrabble, Observations on a Patch of Land", or any of the other books by Graves. Staying with Texas authors, I would add to the list the powerful historical novel about a rancher struggling with the drought of the 50s, "The Time It Never Rained" by Elmer Kelton.

The book, "Enchanted Rock: A Natural and Human History" by Lance Allred, is a fascinating book that is not only about the geology and ecology of Enchanted Rock but is also filled with literally thousands of photos of the flora and fauna Allred chronicled during the many hundreds of hours he spent in the park.

For an account of travels and exploration in our area in the 1840s, I would recommend "Roemer's Texas" by Ferdinand Roemer, translated by Oswald Mueller.

To help you, and/or your friends and relatives, learn about and how to identify, the native Hill Country plants around them, I would recommend: "Trees, Shrubs, and Vines of the Texas Hill Country" by Jan Wrede, "Wildflowers of the Texas Hill Country" by Marshall Enquist, and "Grasses of the Texas Hill Country" by Brian and Shirley Loflin. Anyone who is serious about understanding our Hill Country landscape needs these three books.

I am sure anyone who likes birds already has one or several "bird books" to help in identification. But serious birders might be interested in learning about their behavior, and "The Behavior of Texas Birds" by Dr. Kent Rylander will certainly contribute to that goal.

Other identification-type books include: "Mammals of Texas Field Guide", by Stan Tekiela, "Butterflies of North America", by Jim Brock and Kenn Kaufman, "Butterflies through Binoculars: the West", by Jeffrey Glassberg, "A Field Guide to Texas Snakes",

by Alan Tennant, and “A Field Guide to Common Texas Insects”, by Bastiaan Drees and John Jackman.

For those interested in J. David Bamberger and the Bamberger Ranch Preserve, there is the biography, “Water from Stone, The Story of Selah, Bamberger Ranch Preserve” by Jeffrey Greene.

There is a brand new book by my friend David Langford, Past Executive Vice-President of the Texas Wildlife Association and professional photographer. “Hillingdon Ranch: Four Seasons, Six Generations” by David Langford and Lorie Cantu is a “coffee table” book filled with many excellent photos from around David’s ancestral ranch north of Comfort. In amongst the photos is a story of land management and land stewardship.

Any Texan interested in Nature should have a subscription to the “Texas Parks and Wildlife” magazine which is filled with interesting stories and great photos every month. Go to www.tpwmagazine.com to subscribe.

The Native American Seed Company in Junction packages several good books along with packets of locally-grown native seeds and a very informative, photo-filled catalog in gift sets, and they will even gift wrap them for you if you wish. Go to www.seedsource.com and to “gifts”.

Finally, allow me to suggest, for any Hill Country landowner, my book “Hill Country Landowners Guide” to help people understand their land and how to be better stewards of their land.

More information about most all of the books listed above can be found on my website. The book list can be found at www.hillcountrynaturalist.org on the ecology page, or go directly to www.hillcountrynaturalist.org/ecology/htm.

Happy shopping and be sure to get yourself something too.

Until Next time...

Jim Stanley is a Texas Master Naturalist and the author of the book “Hill Country Landowner’s Guide”. He can be reached at jstmn@kctc.com. Previous columns can be seen at www.hillcountrynaturalist.org.