

## How to Become More Involved in Nature-Related Activities

I assume if you are reading this column you are at least somewhat interested in, and/or have affection for, nature and the Hill Country fauna and flora. If so, then there are a number of ways you can be more involved in these topics. Here are some of them.

The Hill Country chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists is centered in Kerrville but covers 10 counties from Kendall to Edwards to Mason and back. It is an all-volunteer organization sponsored by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Our mission statement is: "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."

We now have around 400 members doing volunteer work in those counties involving maintaining native plant gardens at several locations, helping in various ways in local and state parks, speaking to various groups, both children as well as adults, on nature topics, and doing citizen science projects. If you are interested in becoming a Master Naturalist, this year's class consists of 12 sessions beginning August 24, and more information can be obtained by contacting Lisa Flanagan at [hillcountrymembership@gmail.com](mailto:hillcountrymembership@gmail.com) or 830-928-2080.

If that is too much commitment, our monthly meetings are free and open to the public and more information about these meetings and all of our other activities can be found by reading our newsletter on our website, [www.txtm.org/hillcountry.com](http://www.txtm.org/hillcountry.com).

There are three Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) chapters in our area; in Kerrville, Fredericksburg, and Boerne. Information about their meetings and various projects can be obtained from their websites, [www.npsot.org/wp/Kerrville/](http://www.npsot.org/wp/Kerrville/), [www.npsot.org/wp/Fredericksburg/](http://www.npsot.org/wp/Fredericksburg/), and [www.npsot.org/wp/Boerne/](http://www.npsot.org/wp/Boerne/). NPSOT chapters hold monthly meetings and/or field trips and most all of these meetings are open to the public. The main goal of NPSOT is to: "promote the conservation, research, and utilization of the native plants and plant habitats of Texas."

Riverside Nature Center (RNC) located on Francisco Lemos on the banks of Town Creek and at an access point to the River Trail, serves many functions. It has an arboretum with many native Texas trees and shrubs, various wildflower beds with native wildflowers blooming throughout the year, and displays of different Hill Country nature topics. The center is also the site of many activities throughout the year, some sponsored by other organizations and some sponsored by RNC itself. Most of these gatherings are open to the public. For more information or to find out about upcoming events, go to [www.riversidenaturecenter.org](http://www.riversidenaturecenter.org).

Riverside Nature Center is a mostly-volunteer organization and could always use more volunteers in all sorts of activities including greeting visitors, working on displays, gardening, maintenance projects, helping with children's groups, etc.

Two other local nature centers are the Cibolo Nature Center in Boerne, [www.Cibolo.org](http://www.Cibolo.org) and the Fredericksburg nature center in Lady Bird Johnson Park in Fredericksburg, [fredericksburgnaturecenter.com](http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com). These three nature centers are all different and all provide excellent examples of native plants in native habitats. These nature centers are also always looking for more volunteers.

In addition to all of the above. I should point out that many of the local state parks have volunteer organizations or volunteer activities that can use volunteer help. They include Enchanter Rock SP, Old Tunnel SP, Hill Country SNA, and the Kerrville Schreiner City Park.

One thing I can guarantee is that if you are at all interested in nature and native habitats, if you enjoy nature and natural areas, you will meet like-minded folks at all of these meetings and may very well make new friends. For many of us involved in all of these organizations, we would count a number of members of these organizations as our best friends, and that just adds to the enjoyment of attending these meetings.

I would also strongly encourage parents or grandparents to take their kids or grandkids to all of these locations and meetings. Too many kids these days spend way too much time indoors looking at some kind of electronic gadget and not enough time outdoors. You might be introducing them to a whole new world they never knew existed, and it could change their lives.

Until next time...

Jim Stanley is a Texas Master Naturalist and the author of the books "Hill Country Landowner's Guide" and "A Beginner's Handbook for Rural Texas Landowners: How to Live in the Country Without Spiling It". He can be reached at [jstmn@krc.com](mailto:jstmn@krc.com). Previous columns can be seen at [www.hillcountrynaturalist.org](http://www.hillcountrynaturalist.org).