

More Time Spent on the Nature Trail. Plant Sale Tomorrow!

It had been about six weeks since I had been out on the Nature trail and about two weeks since the last rain, so I was interested in seeing if there was anything new. It is always interesting to just sit alone in the pasture and look and listen. I never lack for something to catch my eye and hold my attention for a time.

On my first stop, I got to looking at the various rocks lying on the ground and the variety of rock types. I know from basic geology that they are all limestone and that they all were formed in shallow seas that periodically covered this area several million years ago. And I know that, being on an “upland” site that is relatively flat and about 2000 feet above sea level, this area was not likely part of a river or creek bed—those types of areas are to the north and south of where I was sitting. So I found the variety of rocks, given their similar origin and environment, interesting.

Some of the rocks are almost pure white, others gray, still others reddish. Some were smooth in texture, some rough and irregular shaped, some contained obvious small fossils. Some displayed tiny quartz crystals and others showed areas of chert. So just looking at the rocks is fun, and if you pick up enough of them, you will almost certainly find a scorpion!

Some of these rocks may have been laid down in clean water seas while others may have been formed in muddy estuaries of runoff from mountain erosion. Some areas along the trail are pretty much free of surface rocks, some areas show numerous surface rocks making walking difficult, and still other areas show the tops of bedrock protruding from the soil in places.

So rocks help make the trail interesting and diverse.

Further along the trail I noticed that the top had broken off of the “baobab tree”. Of course, it was not a real baobab tree, but that is what we called it when we first saw it nearly 20 years ago, because it had an unusually wide trunk and relatively few branches or leaves—just like the real baobab trees we had seen in Africa many years before.

Actually the tree was a post oak and if you walked around it you would find that the trunk was really just a shell that was totally hollowed out and there was even a small hole through what was left of the trunk. The top died a few years ago from hypoxylon, so it was not surprising that the top would break off.

Wildlife noted on this visit included 3 or 4 turkeys off 200 yards or so away, a white-tailed doe walking out of the cedar, a red wasp hunting along the tips of the grass, hovering now and then, but never landing, and a bumble bee that zipped past my face on what appeared to be an important errand.

Not much was blooming on this visit at the end of August. The only actual blooms I saw were on two-leaved sennas, a toxic native wildflower that nothing eats much of and a single low vervain, both responding to the rain two weeks ago.

The Fall Native Plant Sale at Riverside Nature Center will be held tomorrow, Saturday, Oct 4 from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. This sale is a joint effort of the Riverside Nature Center and the Hill Country Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist. The purpose of these sales is to help homeowners find native plants for their landscapes that are likely to do well in our area. There will be a wide variety of trees and perennials to choose from. Native trees and shrubs we expect to have available include American beautyberry, anacacho orchid tree, cedar elm, Eve's necklace, evergreen sumac, flame-leaf sumac, goldenball leadtree, Mexican buckeye, Mexican plum, possumhaw, Spanish oak, Texas ash, and Texas redbud. Also, perennials such as autumn sages in several colors, rock rose and Gregg's mistflower.

There will also be talks on aquatic invertebrates (water bugs) and birds, as well as kids activities, a butterfly exhibit and displays by several local organizations.

So stop by Riverside Nature Center tomorrow and learn more about native plants and take some home for your garden.

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 Spoiling It". He can be reached at jstmn@kctc.com. Previous columns can be seen at www.hillcountrynaturalist.org.