

# The I-20 Wildlife Preserve Clues

## Letterbox Number One

I'm ten million years old and about twice the size of Colorado. When a town needs a drink, underground you will go. My water flows from the northwest to the southeast but if you forget to conserve – my stores will decrease. Sand to gravel then silt to clay, the water always finds its way. Traveling up to 300 meters below; to the wetland that feeds me, don't be slow.

Start at that the start? Yes, that's the best way to say, this first one is easy so don't dismay. How many steps to get where you're going? Three hundred divided by four, a split way of knowing. Speaking of splits, at a fork we've arrived let's take the path where the Brazilian walnut lies. But don't go too far, for I'm under your feet, keep me a secret, secure, and nice and neat. Now solve this riddle and find me with glee, thank you for playing, and good luck to thee.

## Letterbox Number Two

I've been here for years and observed this preserve. To be wise like me, you first must see. Look around at the ground and let me show you what grows. Corner to corner this place is unique. Just pick up your feet and then we can meet. Riparian, prairie, scrubland, forest. These habitats allow ecosystems to exist. Different biomes provide plenty of homes. Animals with feathers, fur, or scales do roam. Here's a hint, my feet are in loam. Enjoy the view of our Playa Lake, where you'll see many birds taking a break. Our Lake is like a bird 'gas station' to fuel mass migration. This playa wetland is in demand by birds to land. Some birds fly away on the Central Flyway, this is like a bird highway, and some birds always stay. Make your way down the boardwalk as I continue to talk, I hope you see a flock and maybe a hawk.

Two ash trees and plenty of mesquites is where you'll meet hard ground. There's lots of sound and it is loud all around. We're parallel to I-20, so you will have to yell. You are on top of a dam and can see the traffic jam. Twelve dozen steps past a bird-blind guarded by my cousin. There he stood, a cottonwood. Surely you could find me you're doing so good. You'll scale off the trail. Watch out, some of me fell. I know you're a good spotter, I'm next to the water, but please do not be a bogtrotter. Be covert while next to the culvert, then follow my arms that hang so low. Where they cross, a box you'll come across.

## Letterbox Number Three

I was built with a path for my visitors to walk. Beneath me run mice and packrats which predators stalk. On a quest to find the next letterbox, you will find it near a "U" in the trail, don't get lost. Look for three bee hotels where you can tell solitary bees have been sleeping until they say farewell. Walk counterclockwise around my playa and you'll encounter these block-comprised boxes. The Southeast corner near a forest will be the first. The second hotel check-in will be about two and a half football fields and yields a wall of small wildflowers. It will be a while, but not a mile to find the second hotel for bees, just search in between the mesquite trees. Between two ephedra bushes it will be found. My ephedra was used by Native Americans and others alike. Historically, thought to cure an illness we deeply dislike.

Now, on to my third bee hotel, and then our clues will get tricky. My bee hotels resemble hives for honey, but are home to native solitary wasps and bees, so you will find that they are not sticky. Along my path, you might spy a few benches, and to the right, bird feeders, where we feed finches. Pairs of cardinals and dove, I love to see them fly above. Just before a boardwalk in a Bermuda grass meadow, the box is on the east side, hidden in a corner so mellow and surrounded by mallow. Then search near the base of the tower where the path zig-zags, and the owl box casts its shadow. Beneath my path on which you search, your next box is perched. It's not on rocks or dirt but concealed next to steel.

#### Letterbox Number Four

I am a place where wildlife thrives, food, water, and shelter, they need these to survive, but human activities are taking a toll, altering habitats, fragmenting them whole. Bobcats, quail, and horned lizards are at risk, their survival depends on our efforts brisk. What is our focus, can you guess? It's protecting habitats, nothing less! The JW Pond, an old caliche mine 10-20 feet deep, a first stop for runoff, a place for ducks to rest. On our North side acts as a barrier to gather sediment so it does not fall in our cracks. Our hidden box lies in a shelter for small creatures.

As you leave our four-story tower, head West along the boardwalk while keeping a lookout for tracks in the mud. Avoid stepping on the boardwalk scat, as it signifies a healthy habitat. Once you pass mile marker .5, keep going until you reach a bridge that crosses over a canal where crawdads and bullfrogs spawn. You'll see another native bee box there. Turn 90° northwest and follow the path until you see a Chinese Pistache tree. You can rest on the bench where a beloved naturalist once sat and gazed about. As you look ahead, you'll see a stump that used to be a tall tree. Stand next to the stump and look at your empty seat facing southeast. The box can be found off the trail. Walk twenty-two paces into the tree canopy and over the fallen tree branch. Now, at the entrance to the packrat's front door, you'll find our box with a stamp and information for you.

#### Letterbox Number Five

They call me beautiful, but I'm so much more, delivering vital resource door to door. A lot of give and a little take, I work overtime to balance each day. Nobody does a relationship like me, the champion of connection and fostering harmony. Despite my best efforts, instability arises; invasive species, industrial development, pollution – my security, compromises. Our greatest challenge yet, am I my parts or am I my whole? Around the loop parallel to South Midland Road, let's take a stroll.

To your right is bamboo tall and grand but wait it's not bamboo – keep on until you understand. Count two clusters of this fine reed and find their sign in between. Once past the reeds, don't be slow; keep on going to the meadow. Butterflies flutter here and there, a sight so lovely it makes you stare. But there's a path that's even better, past a Boy Scout project with beloved nesters. With nature's wonders all around, this walk is truly quite profound. A cattle pen repurposed to a butterfly haven, through the entrance and past the exit – locate the gold in its watery basin. Gliding and glimmering, put them to your back. Twenty paces, and please forgive us, but now it's time to backtrack. Remember the knowledge is worth seeking, take this wide Bermuda path North to where the monarch's wings are beating. Be cautious and careful of snakes that might lie low, as you set course to the meadow. Once you arrive stick to the mulch, time to triangulate if the location's secret you wish to divulge. A home for insect studies, and the life cycle of a royal are points one and two, to find the third a final clue: The train has left the station, but the box remains, to find point three – near branches is where you should aim.

# The I-20 Wildlife Preserve Trail Map



GPS COORDINATES 31.66334°N / 102.12056°W, 31.96256°N / 102.11739°W, 31.96732°N / 102.12063°W, 31.96686°N / 102.12354°W, 31.96570°N / 102.12318°W