

Look carefully at a Cottonwood twig

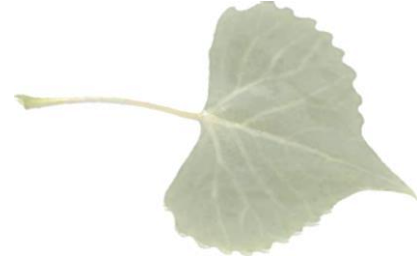
The smallest branches of a tree or shrub are called **twigs**. Take a “twig hike” to observe twigs from many different shrubs and trees. Please only take twigs found on the ground (don’t break them from trees).



Did you know that you can tell the age of a twig? Each year scars are left as the twig grows. These scars look like knuckles on a finger and are called **bud scale scars**. You can count the number of bud scale scars along a twig and know how many years it has grown. Look at the drawing of a twig on the left. How many years has this twig grown?

You can also compare different years by measuring the distance between the bud scale scars—did it grow more one year compared to another year?

Break a twig at one of the bud scale scars. Look at the cross-section of the twig. Is the center a different color? This part of the twig is called the **pith**. If you break a *Cottonwood* twig, you will find a surprise: the pith is star-shaped! This is a characteristic of all trees in the group *Populus* (cottonwoods, willows, poplars, and aspens).



Leaf from a Rio Grande Cottonwood



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Additional information and activities available at

<http://www.nmnaturalhistory.org/educational-resources/sections/bosque-education-guide>

<http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/SPD/heartofaranger.html>