

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

June, 2020 Volume 1 Number 2

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com/>



Editor's Note: Lonnie Childs

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

The dog days of summer seem to be upon us already. Thankfully, we have enjoyed decent spring rains after a slow start, although our annual Memorial Day flood is not always welcome. Our foot-bridge was knocked out temporarily but is fixed in make-shift fashion to allow the strong flow of Live Oak Creek underneath. There is still much flora and fauna to see at the Nature Center, particularly the blooms with butterflies and bees. Just come early.

Speaking of visitors, one of the fruits of our labor is to see the folks that come to enjoy the trails and gardens. There are joggers, hikers, dog walkers, bird watchers, and most importantly families with children. In a future issue, we plan to do a feature entitled "Visitor Snapshots" highlighting our visitors, why they come to the park, and what they enjoy the most. Hopefully, many of you partake of the park, so send me an email telling us about your experience with a photo if you like. We would love to hear from you.



Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie



Happy Nature Trails to Chris Anderson!

Chris Anderson, one of our FFNC Board members and active volunteers at the Nature Center, is re-locating with his wife to Mancos, Colorado. Chris has been instrumental in a number of other local nature organizations including serving as President of the Fredericksburg Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas, as an active Master Naturalist, and as an interpretive guide at Enchanted Rock State Park. He has also taught native landscaping classes in the Texas Tech OLLI program, Fisd continuing education, and the Native Landscape Certification Program (NLCP).

We will sorely miss Chris's contributions in physical labor and as a thought leader but mostly as a good friend who took on tasks willingly and completed them with passion and good humor. The local natural environs will miss his stewardship too. Chris doesn't know it yet, but FFNC is looking for a location in southwest Colorado for a Board retreat next year! Adios amigo for now.



OUR MISSION STATEMENT: "To enhance, protect and interpret the natural ecosystems of the Texas hill country while providing educational and quality of life opportunities for members of the community and visitors"

Trail Observations from a Hike on June 4

by Lonnie Childs



Photo by Lonnie Childs

"Ants have the most complicated social organization on earth next to humans." E.O. Wilson

I found this large circular **Harvester Ant** mound near the parking area. Almost no one loves ants besides a myrmecologist (ant scientist). The South American fire ant invasion has done a lot of damage, both ecologically and to the ant reputation. However, our 11 Texas species of Harvester Ants are beneficial and fascinating to observe. Yes, they have a bad bite but are unlikely to attack you and don't invade your home. Harvester ants are in decline unfortunately, because they are the main food source for our disappearing Horned Lizards. Please, leave that mound alone! Want to know more about Harvester Ants, right click [here](#).



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Queen Butterfly larvae were found in the meadow near the parking lot. I viewed two "princesses" feeding their way on Zizotes milkweed (*Asclepias oenotheroides*) towards queendom. Queen larvae are distinguished from Monarchs by having 3 sets of filaments, whereas Monarchs only have 2 sets. The Queens also have the yellow spotted pattern while Monarchs have transverse yellow stripes on their back.



Photo by Lonnie Childs



Photo by Lonnie Childs

The **Butterfly Habitat** garden near the trail start is in full bloom with Lantana, Zexmenia, Mealy Blue Sage, Autumn Sage, Pigeonberry, White Boneset, and Tropical Sage all showing their colors. Stop and enjoy it.



*We don't inherit the earth from our ancestors,
we borrow it from our children.*

Native American proverb

Trail Observations continued



What is commonly referred to as a “**Fairy Staircase**” of **Mushrooms** can be found on a dying tree along the trail below the Bird Blind. Mushrooms are the fleshy, spore-bearing, fruiting body of a fungus, typically produced above ground, on soil, or on its food source. In this case, a dying tree is the food source. Mushrooms growing on a tree are an indicator of impending morbidity. However, on a more positive note, this demonstrates that a tree can provide sustenance even in the morbid part of its life-cycle.

Photo by Bill Lindemann

We often give notice to the larger splashy wildflowers and neglect to bend down and enjoy the smaller flowers. Typically, the tinier flowers bloom in early spring to beat the taller competition to the sunlight. Check out this **Stickleaf (*Mentzelia oligosperma*)** found on the Vista Loop Trail. It's called Stickleaf because the fine hairs on the leaf enable them to stick to your pants legs. So it's a beautiful small flower with an annoying habit.



Photo by Lonnie Childs



Photo by Lonnie Childs

The meadow on the Live Oak Wilderness Trail exhibits more than two dozen flowers in bloom on a quick count including **Skeleton Plants (*Lygodesmia texana*)**. Their moniker results because they appear to be leaf-less, although they do have a few pinnate leaves at the base which drop early in their growth cycle. Also showing well on the meadow are the numerous dark green clumps of **Little Blue-stem grass (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)**. Our native grasses are gaining more notice as potential landscape plants for their beauty, and since the deer eat very little grass.



When birds burp, it must taste like bugs.

Bill Watterson

Bird Sightings @ the Blind

Why do you go to a Bird Blind to “see” Birds? One of the great enigmas of the ornithological world

Here are a few of the interesting birds that have been seen around the Nature Center the past month.



The **Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*)** is an attractive bird with a cuckoo call and a cool name. They are sometimes called “Rain Crows” since they purportedly issue their calls prior to rainstorms. Living and foraging in the mid-story for insects (they gorge on Tent Caterpillars!), they are more often heard than seen. They come to our water feature for a drink. Western populations have been decimated to the point of being threatened. Fredericksburg is on the western margin of their eastern population. Listen to the Cuckoo cuckoo (right click [here.](#))

The **Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*)** is a large tyrant flycatcher that exhibits typical flycatcher behavior by perching on small treetops or utility lines and periodically swooping down to snatch an insect. Their typical habitat is open areas, and they nest often on utility poles. They exist in all of Texas west of the Piney Woods. A pair has been seen on the back side of the swimming pool likely nesting.



We have **Purple Martins (*Progne subis*)!** Multiple pairs recently moved in to our donated houses located near the parking area. It’s a late date for them to be setting up house, but perhaps their first attempt did not work out. Martins are ravenous insectivores feeding on many of our favorites—Butterflies, Dragonflies, and Moths. To shatter a myth, they do not eat many Mosquitoes, because they feed high in the sky. But who can resist their raucous chatter, and they are one of the few species who actually like hanging around with Humans.



The earth has music for those who listen.

William Shakespeare

June is

Pollinator Month!

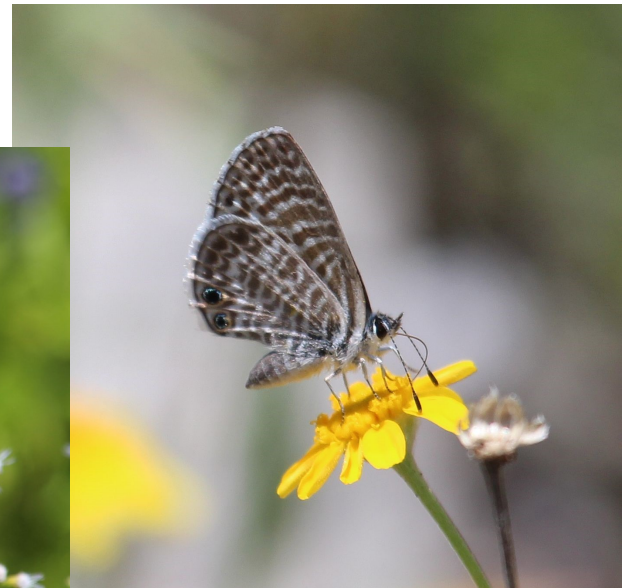
What's Blumen and Buzzin' at the Pollinator Garden?

The garden is in full bloom with lots of fluttering Butterflies and buzzin' Native Bees. It's doing it's job! Go check it out before summer wilt begins. With summer heat coming, the garden crew will go into maintenance mode. They completed new stone paths. Thanks to Karla Trefny for transporting rock from her Banderera ranch and to Frank Garcia for laying the rock.



Texas Greeneyes (*Berlandiera betonicifolia*)
Photo by Lonnie Childs

Monarch and Queen Butterflies debate who is the real royalty of the garden.
Photo by Bill Lindemann



Marine Blue (*Leptotes marina*)
Photo by Bill Lindemann

What's Blumen and Buzzin' at the Pollinator Garden? (continued)

Standing Cypress (*Ipomopsis rubra*)

Photos by Lonnie Childs

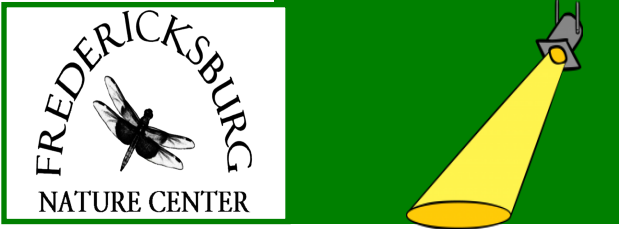


Reakirt's Blue (*Echinargus isola*)
Photo by Bill Lindemann



Soapberry Hairstreak (*Phaeostrymon alcestis*)
Photo by Bill Lindemann





Thanks Tom!!



Volunteer Spotlight: Tom Hynes

For those who have been around the Nature Center for the past 20 years, you can visualize all the amazing progress that has been implemented at the park during that time. The FFNC under Bill Lindemann's leadership took a piece of park land that was considered

to be unusable by the city and has created a nature education center that is to be admired, with more to come. The equally significant fact is that it was accomplished by 99% volunteer labor that continues as I write. In recognition of that, we decided that it is time to recognize those long-laboring volunteers. The reward that you get for doing great work for free is that you have to suffer the spotlight!

There were many choices to start with, but we decided to begin with **Tom Hynes**, our unofficial Superintendent of Construction. If there is something to be built, electrified, or plumbed, Tom is our go to guy. In Tom's own words, here is Tom's story.

'He came, He saw, He joined in'!

I was born in Portsmouth, Virginia. In my very early years, I lived in a village near the North Carolina state line in the Great Dismal Swamp. Later, I grew up in a rural area south of Portsmouth. My father was an immigrant from Newfoundland, and my mother a native of the local area.

I have always been an outdoor person, and my childhood was lived uninhibitedly outdoors before high school. During high school, I lettered in three sports and Debate. Following high school graduation, I moved to Chicago to attend the DeVry Technical Institute and returned to Virginia the following spring. A friend, home from college at Baylor University in Waco, convinced me to join him there for the fall semester. And so it was that I came to Texas in August of that year unfortunately. I had never experienced a temperature such as the one that greeted me upon my arrival. I did attend Baylor for a couple of years before going to work for a local TV repair shop. During this interim, both my mother and younger sister joined me there in Waco as permanent residents.

I married in Waco and have two children and a grandson by that marriage. My son and his wife live in San Antonio and my daughter in Anna, Texas. My grandson lives near Dallas.

While working for the TV repair shop, I studied for my First Class Radio license and became instrumental, as Chief Engineer, in helping to put the first FM radio station in Waco on the air. I was recruited by Texas Instruments in Dallas and went to work for them as a technician, was promoted to Shift Foreman, and progressed finally to Manager of an Equipment Engineering group.



The world owes you nothing. It was here first.

Mark Twain

Volunteer Spotlight: TOM HYNES (continued)

I later married Noreen, whom many of you know or had met, and who recently passed away after 38 years of marriage. This marriage brought into my life three stepsons and ultimately many grandchildren and great grandchildren. They all reside in suburbs north east of Dallas.

After 30 years at TI, I retired and Noreen and I moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. We had visited there and found it to be an exciting and energetic place to reside. Bored with retirement, I lobbied the builder of our house to let me work for him for almost five years as his construction superintendent.

Following the turn of the century, we decided for various reasons to move back to Texas to be closer to our children. On one of our trips to visit my son's family in San Antonio, they brought us to Fredericksburg, where we eventually settled after studying several options in central Texas. I spent our first years following the construction of our house and working to develop the property.

I have to credit Ward Miller for drawing me into the world of volunteering around 2008, through exposure to The Native Plant Society and FFNC. He then introduced me to The Master Naturalist organization whose program I completed in 2010. Through the Master Naturalist, I volunteered at the Muleshoe Farm and Ranch project, meeting John Karger of Last Chance Forever, and engaging in raptor training and assisting in his live presentations. At Muleshoe, I restored an original greenhouse and installed a rainwater harvest system at the 1895 homestead.

I also volunteered through the T.W.A. L.A.N.D.S. program for school students throughout the area. In the latter part of 2011, John Huecksteadt convinced me I could serve the Master Naturalist Chapter as vice president and served for two years. Following board service, I served on special assignment to State Coordinator Michelle Haggerty for three years.

During this time I had become more involved with FFNC, becoming a board member in September of 2013, on which I continue to serve. I have participated in the 3rd Grade Day as an interpreter in the Live Oak forest. I have used my woodworking hobby on many projects including the bridge, the Leopold bench, and the decorative cedarwork on the pergola at the Pollinator Garden. I have also been involved with constructing the FFNC float for the Christmas Parade. Care required for my wife sidelined all of my volunteer activity for the better part of two years.

My most rewarding achievement with FFNC was working with the City Council of Fredericksburg in 2017 to bring about the recognition of Bill Lindemann for all of his contributions to the city, declaring December 4, 2017, as Bill Lindemann Day.

*I consider myself a 'lone wolf', team player, and consider my efforts just 'oil on the skids' to help FFNC keep moving forward. I love the activities we experience, but the best part is working with hard working, creative and dedicated volunteers. **What a list of volunteer accomplishments. Thanks Tom!!***



I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees.

Henry David Thoreau

Feature: The Story of the Understory

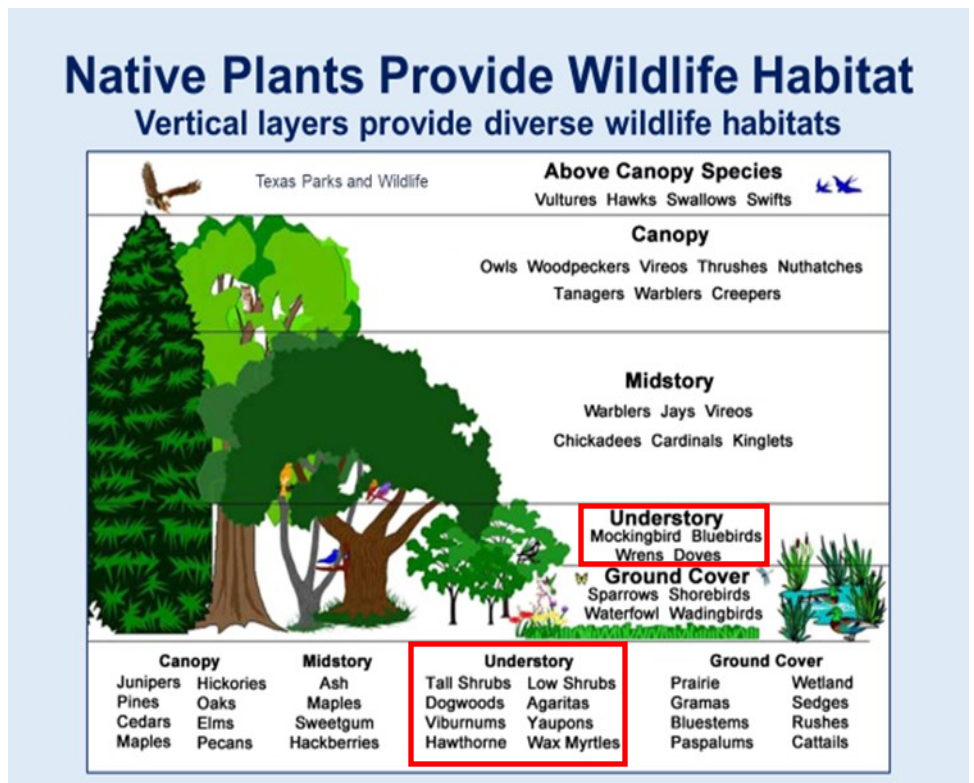
by Lonnie Childs

Would you like more birds in your backyard or personal nature sanctuary? In the words of the songwriter, John Prine, “a question ain’t really a question if you know the answer too.” Almost everyone would appreciate more of our avian friends visiting their home nature preserve, whether it be a small backyard or larger acreage. If you want more birds, then you need better habitat to support them – water, food, and shelter, and the floral component of that habitat should consist of mostly native plants.

The diagram below details the four major components of bird habitat that would be present in a holistic ecosystem. It includes micro-habitat that I would suggest could be the most underappreciated and least understood – Understory. Maybe that’s why they call it **Understory!**

What is Understory? “The understory is the underlying layer of vegetation in a forest or wooded area, especially the trees and shrubs growing between the forest canopy and the forest floor.” (Wikipedia). The diagram provides examples of the Texas native plants that are typical of this micro-habitat.

Why is Understory important? Understory is composed of rich and diverse plant life, including some of our most interesting species. This botanical richness supports an even more diverse array of faunal species – birds, butterflies, moths, small mammals, and yes, deer.



What are the threats to Understory? There are three main threats in the Hill Country.

1. Humans – We move to the Hill Country and love to impose our misguided sense of order by cleaning up the “brush” and wiping out important habitat.
2. Deer – Their main source of nutrition is “browse”, which is the new vegetational growth found on shrubs and trees. As an aside, deer are also ravenously consuming the tree saplings which would become future Midstory and Canopy habitat.



Love the world as your own self; then you can truly care for all things.

Lao Tzu

Feature: The Story of the Understory (continued)

3. Goats – They love their browse too! Watching them stand on hind legs while stretching up for some fresh browse is comical until you recognize that there is no vegetation between the ground and their six foot browse line.

What can we Humans do to restore Understory? There are two major opportunities which will increase Understory and beautify your landscape.

1. Leave that brush alone! Don't cut all of that brush out. Ok, you can trim it up, thin out overly aggressive species, and generally make it look neater without decimating it.
2. Enhance an existing Understory or create a new one (you just need some existing Midstory or Canopy trees) by adding some native plant species. Our Fredericksburg NPSOT chapter can provide a plant list at <https://npsot.org/wp/fredericksburg/files/2014/02/Plant-List.pdf> and will also consult with you upon request. If deer are a problem, then you will need some exclosures, but a few plants can survive the deer – Texas Barberry, Agarita and Persimmon for example.

Here are examples of great Texas native Understory plants that can be seen at FNC's new Understory.

Many Understory plants provide flowers & berries plus aesthetic interest to your landscape.



American Beautyberry *Callicarpa americana*
3-6 ft shrub Photo by Andy & Sally Wasowski



Possumhaw *Ilex decidua*
10-15 ft tree Photo by Lee Page



The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness.

John Muir

Feature: The Story of the Understory (continued)



Wafer Ash/Hoptree
10-20 ft tree

Ptelea trifoliata
Photo by R.W. Smith



Rusty Blackhaw Viburnum
10-20 ft shrub/tree

Viburnum rufidulum
Photo by Edith Bettinger

Fredericksburg Nature Center's Understory Project

Mary Ellen Terrell and team have been engaged in an on-going renovation of the understory within the Bird Blind that has now expanded to the area adjacent to the Bird Blind. The enhanced micro-habitat will serve as an Understory demonstration venue while also attracting a greater variety of birds to the Blind.

The initial effort in the adjacent area involved cleaning up the existing habitat with help from the Texas Exes (yes, even Mother Nature can get out of balance in the short-term).

Greenbriar (*Smilax* sp.) and Mustang Grapevines had overwhelmed the trees forming a dense mat over the tree vegetation. The tree canopy needed to be lifted to allow for space and sunlight for the Understory species, and the clean-up effort also included reducing the numerous Hackberry saplings that were competing for space.



The Bird Blind Understory has been “cleaned up” & is now populated with plantings of native species that provide food & beauty.



Adopt the pace of nature. Her secret is patience.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Feature: The Story of the Understory (continued)

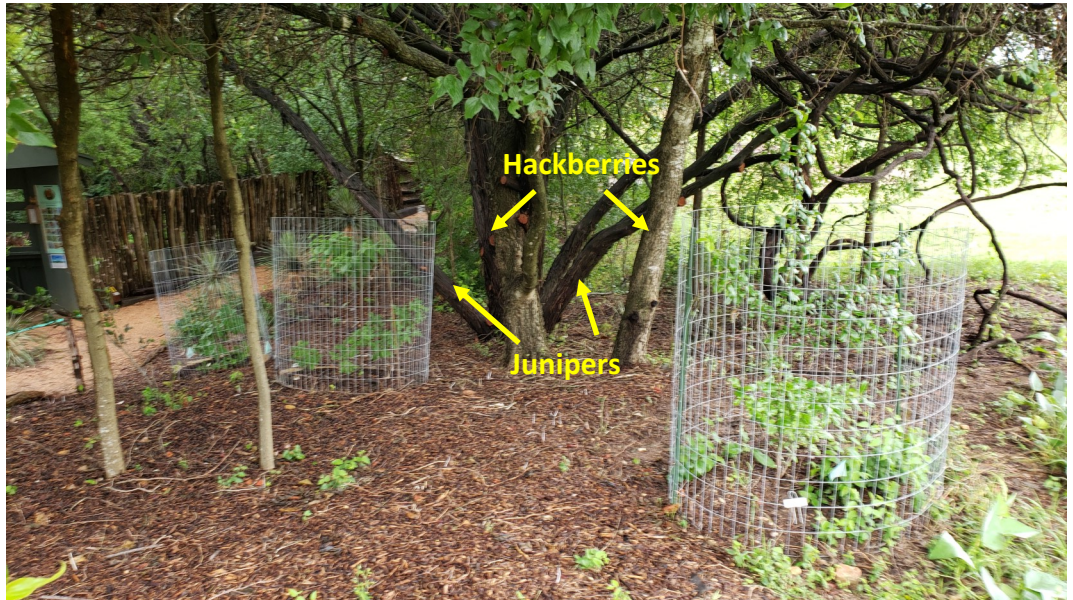
The center “mast” that forms an umbrella and support matrix is a Sugar Hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*) along with an Ashe Juniper. The oft-maligned Sugar Hackberry provides edible fruit that attracts birds and small mammals as well as serving as the host plant for five species of butterflies.

The current work involves planting a variety of Understory species that

will provide more forage and aesthetic interest in the area. New small tree and shrub plantings in the Bird Blind and adjacent area include Possumhaw, Wafer Ash/Hoptree, Rusty Blackhaw Viburnum, Kidneywood, Texas Barberry, Barbados Cherry, Chile Pequin, Carolina Buckthorn, Texas Persimmon, Eve’s Necklace, Texas Hawthorn, Yaupon Holly, Texas Mulberry and American Beautyberry. To provide ground color and floral interest, a number of shade tolerant forbs have been planted in the Bird Blind including Cardinal Flower, Tropical Sage, Cedar Sage, two varieties of False Dragonhead and a variety of grasses. This assemblage of botanical diversity will serve up quite the bird buffet.



The Understory adjacent to the Bird Blind.



New plantings in the ongoing Understory project. The Hackberries and Junipers provide an umbrella canopy for the understory plants.

The next time that you visit our trail, be sure to check out the on-going renovation project and learn as you watch The Story of the Understory evolve before your eyes!



The butterfly counts not months but moments, and has time enough.

Rabindranath Tagore

Scheduled Events

July 15 Who's That Knocking in the Woods? A Woodpecker Presentation by Bill Lindemann

TO BE DETERMINED. LOOK FOR FUTURE UPDATES.



Queen Butterfly (*Danaus gilippus*) on
Texas Greeneyes (*Berlandiera betonicifolia*)

Photo by Lonnie Childs

**Thanks for your continued support of the
Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center!**

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Go to <http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com/membership> for more information

Comments, questions, or future newsletter submissions can be sent to Lonnie Childs,
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