

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

August, 2020 Volume 1 Number 4

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com/>

Editor's Musings: Lonnie Childs

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

In the last newsletter issues, I have been extolling the virtues of our Nature Center and encouraging you to visit and enjoy the benefits of nature experiences. Now I'd like to take a different tack and sing the praises of creating your own nature center in your backyard or plot of land. Habitat loss continues to be a major cause of biodiversity and species loss in our natural world.

Putting the brakes on habitat loss seems to be a daunting problem beyond the pale of individuals to address, but consider this. Doug Tallamy, a PhD Entomologist, wrote a wonderful book entitled *Bringing Nature Home* which specifically evangelizes for the creation of backyard habitats. He presents an eye-opening and compelling statistic that there are 20 million acres of national park in the US and 40 million acres of backyards. What if we could convert 50% of those backyards into mini-nature centers? That would create 20 million acres of habitat!

What does good habitat consist of? The basics of a functioning habitat are a variety of native plants that provide food, shelter, and nesting/hosting opportunities. Additionally, you need to provide a water source, and some supplemental feeding is acceptable (ex. Hummingbird feeders). Two terms are generally applied to this new landscaping paradigm—Wildscaping or more recently Re-Wilding.

How do you design your own mini-nature center? There are numerous books, websites, and resources that can help you design and create your backyard habitat. You don't have to do it all at once, but can start small and implement your plan as time and finances allow. Utilize existing plant resources and integrate your micro-habitat with the surrounding natural habitat. Below are just a few of the helpful resources.

What are the benefits for you? Beyond feeling good about practicing good land stewardship and being environmentally conscious, you will enjoy a beautiful landscape populated with birds, butterflies, and bees. You can even appoint yourself Executive Director of the John or Jane Doe Nature Center. Consider it.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie



- ◆ *Bringing Nature Home* by Doug Tallamy
- ◆ *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard* by Doug Tallamy
- ◆ *Texas Wildscapes: Gardening for Wildlife* by Kelly Conrad Bender
- ◆ **Nature Plant Society of Texas /Fredericksburg Chapter**—Website, Plant Lists, Native Landscape Certification Program (NLCP), The Pollinator Garden Assistance and Recognition Program (PGARP) npsot.org/fredericksburg
- ◆ **National Wildlife Federation (NWF)** - Garden for Wildlife program <https://www.nwf.org>
- ◆ **Audubon Society**—Plants for Birds <https://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds>



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 and Garden Projects

Vista Trail Repair: The repair of the down-hill section adjacent to the Bird Blind is largely finished. There will be some further enhancements done to the section near where the trail levels out at the bottom.

BSA to the Rescue! In late July, Boy Scouts of America (BSA) troop 520G of Cedar Hill and troop 215 of Midlothian were camping at the LBJ RV park and were looking for opportunities to perform service hours. Note that these BSA troops consist of all female members. They agreed to help with our trail repair efforts by hauling and raking gravel which resulted in the completion of 34 feet of trail. Others watered plants in the Bird Blind area. We were thrilled to have their help and even happier that we could engage them in an outdoors project in service to Mother Nature.



Photo by Lonnie Childs



(BSA) troops 520G of Cedar Hill & 215 of Midlothian help on the Vista Loop Trail Photos by Jane Crone





"A walk in nature walks the soul back home."

Mary Davis

Along the Trail Observations

Whenever I begin to wonder what I will write about and feature about our Nature Center, I just take a walk along the trail. Even in the dog days of summer, something is always happening with Mother Nature Just waiting to be discovered.

Mustang Grape (*Vitis mustangensis*)

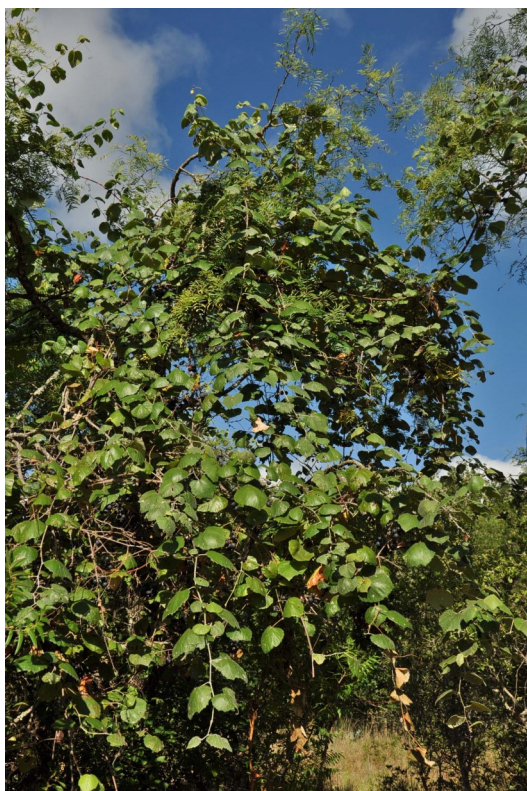
Texas has 14 grape species with this being the most prevalent in central TX. Gillespie Co. is perhaps its' western most location. It's heart-shaped or lobed leaves are dark green on top & gray underneath. The grapes are highly acidic & can irritate your skin. **DO NOT EAT** the grape skin but you can squeeze out the edible pulp for a sweet treat. With enough sugar, they make a tart jelly & were also used to make wine by early European settlers. Birds, small mammals & deer will eat the fruit.



↑ **Mustang Grapes** ready for the picking or eating.

← Grapevine climbing tree on Live Oak Trail. They can aggressively smother a tree's vegetation & break limbs due to the weight.

↓ Grapevine root near Bird Blind about 6" in diameter.



"Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt."

John Muir

Along the Trail Observations continued

I found this juvenile **Nine-banded Armadillo (*Dasyus novemcinctus*)** foraging mid-day in the leaf litter along Live Oak Trail. Adults will normally only feed at twilight or night. They are omnivores but mostly eat small invertebrates. Armadillos are migrants from South/Central America who arrived in Texas about 1850 & have now spread east to Florida & north to Missouri. Females typically birth 4 babies at least twice yearly. Their favored habitats are riparian & forested areas along with our landscape beds!



Nine-banded Armadillo (*Dasyus novemcinctus*)

Photos by
Lonnie Childs



Ball Moss (*Tillandsia recurvata*)

Texas Bromeliads? Yes, we have 5 species including our local **Ball Moss (*Tillandsia recurvata*)**. The other species are Spanish and Bailey Mosses plus two Hechtias which are Agave-like terrestrial species in south and west Texas. The "mosses" are not really mosses but flowering epiphytic Bromeliads that attach to tree limbs (Oaks are favorites) and pull nutrients and moisture from the atmosphere. Photosynthesis provides their main food source. It does not parasitize the tree, and arborists generally agree that it will not kill a healthy tree, but will thrive on an already struggling tree that is losing vegetation. *T. recurvata* is a hardy opportunist that grows from the southern U.S. to southern South America. Many look at this plant and see an ugly colorless mass. Upon closer examination, try to appreciate its interesting form of curving, intertwined narrow leaves and delicate flower stalks.

"A flower does not use words to announce its arrival to the world,
it just blooms."
Matshona Dhiwayo

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

Blooms



Sacred Datura (*Datura wrightii*)

3-6 ft annual/perennial forb

Sometimes called Jimson or Loco Weed because of its toxic effects on livestock. Used by Native Americans for medicinal & religious purposes since the roots and seedpods contain Scopolamine which is both hallucinogenic & narcotic. All parts of the plant are toxic so be aware when planting it.



The flowers are finished in the garden but you can still see the ethereal seed pods, also known as Sacred Thorn-apples.





*"Butterflies are nature's angels.
They remind us what a gift it is to be alive."*

Robyn Nola

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

3 Swallowtails are flitting around the Butterfly Garden!



Photo by Bill Lindemann

Giant Swallowtail (*Papilio cresphontes*)



Photo by Bill Lindemann

Cloudless Sulphur (*Phoebis sennae*)

The Queens continue to hold court in large numbers in the Pollinator Garden!



Photo by Bill Lindemann

Sleepy Orange (*Eurema nicippe*)



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Queen (*Danaus gilippus*)

"To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee, One clover, and a bee,
And revery. The revery alone will do, If bees are few."

Emily Dickinson

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



Clouded Skipper
(*Lerema accius*) on
Rock Rose or Rose Pavonia
(*Pavonia lasiopetala*)

Summer Butterfly Count continues with Bill Lindemann observing the following species #35-41 since early June.

Julia's Skipper, Horace's Duskywing, Clouded Skipper, Cloudless Sulphur, Question Mark, American Snout, and Common Checkered Skipper.

All Photos by Lonnie Childs

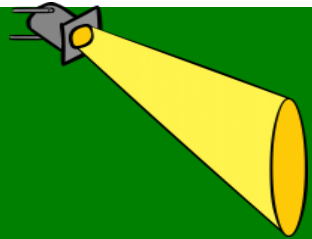
Bordered Patch (*Chlosyne lacinia*) on Blue Mist



Oleander or Milkweed Aphid
(*Aphis nerii*)

Non-native Mediterranean species which will do damage to your milkweed plants. They can be eradicated with a mixture of water, dish soap, vinegar, and alcohol, but take care not to kill any Monarch larvae. Wash mixture after application directly on the aphids.





Volunteer Spotlight: Gracie Waggener

Gracie currently serves as our Work Coordinator, announcing our weekly project needs and assignments, and generally keeping us on task and focused. Additionally, she is the Head Gardener at the Pollinator Garden for which all our human and insect visitors are highly grateful. Here is her story in her own words. Editor

I was born and raised in Kingsville, Texas and subsequently lived in Houston, Beaumont, Humble, San Antonio and now Kerrville. I attended Texas A&I in Kingsville. (I have found that the Home Economics Degree is finally worth something in a pandemic). My parents bought the property that I have in 1975, and we bought it from my Mom in 1998 when we moved here. My Dad, who taught Building Trades, built my house located on the Guadalupe River.

I was very lucky growing up that we had friends and family with farms and ranches to go and explore. My dad loved to get out and wander, was a hunter, fisherman and never “let” me be a girl. I did it and learned it all with him - guns and shooting, fishing, electrical wiring, plumbing, auto mechanics, whatever I need to learn to take care of myself. He defiantly taught me to love nature. I probably loved it more than him since I always gave him a hard time about killing things. I wanted to take them home as pets - deer, armadillos, fish, quail - whatever we came across.

We had friends who owned a ranch in Barksdale where we went as kids to spend time in the summer. The owner, Jim Boone, was an environmentalist and land manager before anyone knew those words, He taught me about animals, tracks, plants, creeks and rivers, indigenous peoples and artifacts without me realizing he was teaching.

After we moved here and I was not working full time anymore, I went through the Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) classes in 2007. I was working as a Convention Florist and traveling all over the U.S. for work, but I took off time to do the classes. (Unfortunately, the class dates were always when we worked at the State fair on the truck displays). I would say that the classes are what opened many new doors into the natural world for me. During that time is when I met Bill Lindemann and Jane Crone and got involved with FFNC. The HAT trail work was being done that year and I helped with that project. From there, my volunteer efforts progressed to the other park projects including the design and planting of the Pollinator Garden, re-working the Cactus Garden, the Christmas Parade floats, FFNC Board, and all the other things that we work on now.

Besides FFNC, I have worked with Texas Wildlife Association LANDS Program (2011 Volunteer of the Year), Riverside Nature Center, Kerrville Schreiner Park Butterfly Garden, TMN New Class Committee, Upper Guadalupe River Association Eduscape, Canyon Lake Gorge tour docent, NPSOT Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas program, NABA butterfly counts, Christmas Bird Counts, Monarch Larva Monitoring Project at the Kerr WMA, and Monarch tagging in the fall. I also do the TMN Hill Country Chapter merchandising - shirts, hats , bags etc. No one was doing it when I joined the chapter so I guess I created my own project.

NO, I am not the over-achiever, just the hyper active child!
In nature you can always be a child.





*"How bright and beautiful a comet is as it flies past our planet—
provided it does fly past it. "*

Isaac Asimov

A Planetary Visitor—NEOWISE

NEOWISE Comet visited our skies in mid-July. The comet was only discovered in March, 2020, by the Wide-field Infrared Survey Explorer (WISE) space telescope and is the brightest comet seen by Earthlings in the northern hemisphere since Hale-Bopp in 1997.

NEOWISE traverses a near parabolic orbit around the Sun that requires almost 6700 years to complete. Like most comets, it has two tails that extend for millions of miles. The first, made of dusty debris, shines golden as it reflects sunlight. The second tail, made of electrically charged gas particles blasted by solar radiation, glows faintly blue toward the left.

NEOWISE has a nucleus about 3 miles wide made of dust, gas and plasma (ionized gas). As comets rocket toward the sun from interstellar space or the outer solar system, sunlight causes ice in the comet to turn directly into gas (or sublime). As the ice gasses away, it pulls material from the comet's surface with it. Source: space.com



Photo by Bill Lindemann

"I think we consider too much the good luck of the early bird and not enough the bad luck of the early worm."

President Franklin D. Roosevelt

Birds Around the Park



Photo by
Bill Lindemann

Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) on Live Oak Lake

An immature bird probably in its 1st spring. These herons normally forage at night & spend the day hidden among branches near their usual habitat of marshes, ponds, ditches, or swamps. Their diet consists of mainly crustaceans (crabs & crawfish) near the coast, but on inland waters, they have a more varied diet of fish, turtles, or insects. They excrete strong stomach acid in order to digest the crustacean shells.

Listen to the sound of the Heron by right clicking [here](#) and then click Open Hyperlink. Source:audubon.com



*"Oh that I had wings like a dove!
for then would I fly away, and be at rest. "*

Psalms 55: 6

Feature: White-winged Doves a.k.a. "Flying Pigs" by Bill Lindemann

There is an old expression that we sometimes use when presented with an incredulous assertion that has a miniscule probability of ever occurring. We simply respond, "Yeah right, when pigs fly." Well it could be that the expression is now passé and incredulous events are about to occur.

In these dog days of August, few birds visit the Bird Blind in the mid-day heat. It's just too hot for even the local birds, except for one relatively recent interloper. They come in gangs and empty our feeders while driving off other potential diners. They are beautiful birds dressed for fine dining with blue eye shadow and red shoes. But their gluttonous behavior qualifies them for the title of "Flying Pigs." Get ready for strange things to happen.

Following is an edited version of an article written by Bill and reprised from his newspaper column of past. Editor



**White-winged Dove
*Zenaida asiatica***

Photo by
Bill Lindemann

White-winged Doves a.k.a. "Flying Pigs"

The White-winged Dove (WWD) is another of the South Texas birds that has been steadily moving its range northward. First, they expanded their breeding range into Central Texas, and more recently are becoming year round residents. Over the years, many of you may have had a change of heart about the attraction of WWDs as they gorge themselves at your feeder, emptying its contents, while scaring off any competitors.

As the dove's name implies, their white wing patch is very distinctive in flight and serves as its most recognizable feature for identification. Even at rest, the white feathers form a white stripe along the folded wing. About the same size as our resident Mourning Doves, the two species may be confused for each other. WWDs have a shorter, more squared tail. Both doves have prominent white patches on the tips of the outer tail feathers and a short black streak on their necks. Only the White-winged Dove has a patch of blue facial skin around the eye.

Both doves have distinctive calls that distinguish them. The WWD has a barking call that sounds like "who, who cooks for you." The Mourning Dove has the mournful "oowoo-woo-woo-woo" call. Both dove's calls are sometimes mistaken for the call of owls, but owls mainly hoot at dusk or after dark when the doves are silent.

To hear the call of the **White-winged Dove**, right click [here](#) and Open Hyperlink.

For the call of the **Mourning Dove** right click [here](#) and Open Hyperlink.

"When Pigs Fly..."



Feature: White-winged Doves (continued)

Doves are grain and seed eaters. They eat much of the waste grain left in fields after harvest. Doves will also voraciously frequent back yard feeding areas while preferring to feed on the ground. White-winged Doves supplement their diets with cactus and succulent flowers and fruits when available. The gradual migration of the WWD further northward is related to favorable food supplies being available.

Traditionally WWDs migrated into the South Texas Scrub brush vegetation zone as far north as San Antonio and returned to Mexico and the Lower Rio Grande Valley for the winter months. In the 1990s, some of the doves did not return to their former winter homes

and stayed in San Antonio. Each year that passed saw an increasingly larger number elect not to return to the south. Many of them moved into cities, including most of our major urban areas. The likely reason they stayed is that they found many bird feeders in backyards.

Lot of cities also harbor pecan trees in the suburbs. Fredericksburg is a good example where pecan nuts fall into the streets and are crushed by cars, thus exposing food for hungry doves. I have also observed large flocks of WWDs leaving the city in the mornings for grain fields in the surrounding Hill Country rural areas and return at dusk to their roosts in the city. Some people ascribe this movement of WWD northward to climate change, but finding available food all year negated the reason to migrate southward in the fall. My understanding is that WWDs have moved into the mid Great Plains states, but likely have to retreat southward to survive the harsher northern winters

Primarily because of their larger size, the WWD is a prized target of bird hunters, especially in the Rio Grande Valley. Here, in the fall the doves form huge flocks just before they depart for more temperate climes in Mexico. Despite some birds wintering here, the vast majority still migrate into Mexico for the winter months.

WWDs, like most members of the dove and pigeon family, build poorly constructed platforms of sticks and twigs on a flat forked limb. These doves prefer more arid mesquite woods and usually nest in colonies. The doves will lay two to four creamy white eggs. If you approach a nest after the chicks are hatched, the parent doves will fly to the ground and attempt to distract you with the broken wing act.

So you decide. White-winged Doves are beautiful birds with interesting alluring calls that make them interesting additions to our backyard habitats. But no one enjoys an obnoxious dinner guest that eats more than their fair



Flying Pigs at the Trough. Photo by Bill Lindemann



Red-tailed Pennant (*Brachymesia furcata*) in Obelisk posture In the Pollinator Garden

"The obelisk posture is a handstand-like position that some dragonflies and damselflies assume to prevent overheating on sunny days. The abdomen is raised until its tip points at the sun, minimizing the surface area exposed to solar radiation." Wikipedia

Photo by Bill Lindemann



"The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself."
Henry Miller

Rufous Hummingbirds will be arriving any day now in the Hill Country from the Pacific Northwest where they breed. The males leave the breeding areas as soon as their duties are fulfilled. The males are very orange (rufous) colored and stand out when mixed with our resident hummers. They are also very aggressive in defending feeders .

Bill Lindemann

Look for these future migrants!
Rufous Hummingbirds (*Selasphorus rufus*)



Photo by Bill Lindemann

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**Comments, questions, or future newsletter submissions can be sent to
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