

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

October, 2020 Volume 1 Number 6

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com/>

Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

Just when I think that I could suffer no more of our Texas summer, Mother Nature granted us an outpouring of substantial rain and cooler air from our first refreshing norther to announce the coming of Autumn. Although cooler weather signals the "fall of the leaf" which poets often associated with the onset of melancholy, our Texas climate repays us for the suffering summer with an initial 6-8 weeks of often pleasant weather and a second spring-like bloom on our native flora, sometimes even better than spring. More than just a time of agricultural harvest, Mother Nature serves up a native harvest with waves of native grass seed heads and berries brightly offering themselves to passing birds.

Speaking of birds, the bird-watching doldrums of summer have ended, and we are treated to passing migrants on their journey south who stop for a drink, rest, or some sustenance and allow us a peak at their worn plumage. The Monarchs pass in a flutter and stop to mingle with the local Lepidopterans while taking advantage of the fall bloom, engorging themselves with nectar for the long flight to the Sierra Madres, west of Mexico City.

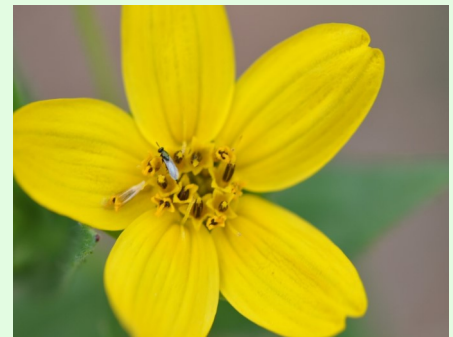
Treasure this special time between summer and the "fall of the leaf" for there is much to be discovered at the Nature Center. The Pollinator Garden is still bursting with floral color and a host of butterflies and bees. The Bird Blind will no doubt offer some unusual migratory species for your life list. The trails always reveal some interesting glimpse of natural beauty or pique your curiosity. Come and visit. And now I'll stop waxing before I start waning.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

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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

Bird Blind Gets a Picket Fence

Work on the picket fence around the Bird Blind is completed! The fence will exclude deer from entering the Bird Blind and eating our understory vegetation while also providing sight screening between the nearby Vista Loop trail and the blind. Additionally, the picket fence is an attractive backdrop for the whole Bird Blind experience.

This style fence is sometimes called a “coyote fence” by local old-timers, since they were constructed in the 19th century from the readily available cedar trees in order to prevent coyotes from attacking livestock.

Thanks to our intrepid fencing team for donating their labor and sweat equity! And in case you were wondering, no, they’re not for hire.



Carl Luckenbach, Frank Garcia, and Tom Hynes.
Bill Lindemann (not pictured).

Pollinator Garden Enjoys a Touch-up

Our beautiful garden is maturing and reaching a new phase where we need to remove some over aggressive plants and do some seed gleaning to maintain control of the limited space available. Phase 1 of gardening is working hard to get plants to grow. If you are very successful, then Phase 2 is to control and sometimes curtail the out of control growth. Oh, the vicissitudes of gardening! It is an ever evolving experiment.

Karla Trefny, Frank Garcia, and Gracie Waggener have continued working on all the paths and rock work in the garden. They have been widening the paths and adding mortar to the rock joints for more stability and improved weed control. Karla generously donated the rock harvested from her Bandera ranch. Thanks Karla, Frank, and Gracie!



Sisters Westwood & Spaulding netting a Monarch with Gracie Waggener



"The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit."

Nelson Henderson

Trail and Garden Projects (continued)

Over the last few months, Gracie has been graced with the help of Sister Spaulding and Sister Westwood who are visiting missionaries with the Church of Latter Day Saints. As part of their mission trip, they are required to engage in a service project, and FFNC is fortunate that they have chosen us to help. The young ladies have been attacking the aggressive petunias every Tuesday with much success.. They seem to be enjoying the garden and learning about the plants and butterflies. Recently, they assisted Gracie in tagging a migrating Monarch butterfly and were thrilled with the exercise, such that one proclaimed that it was one of the most exciting experiences of her mission trip. We thank them for the excellent help and applaud Gracie for mentoring some hopefully budding naturalists.

We recently received a grant from the Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas (BBMT) program sponsored by the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT). The BBMT program provides funding to public gardens for the purchase of native plants in support of the creation of butterfly habitats (specifically Monarchs) across Texas. After our clean and glean work at the PG is completed, we will be purchasing some additional plants that will add nectar and host plant diversity to our garden.

Outreach and Education

Texas Master Naturalist Workshops

In support of our Hill Country Master Naturalists who have provided countless hours of labor at FNC, we are continuing to hold small workshops for 2020 class members who were not able to attend regular classes due to Covid safety factors and governmental mandates. The workshops are intended to serve as an appetizer to hold members' interest until regular classes can be held in 2021. These workshops are for the 2020 class enrollees only and are limited in number and practice social distancing. Bill Lindemann has conducted two birding 101 sessions in October. Subsequently, Cathy Downs, Gracie Waggener, and Bill will present a Pollinator workshop in our Pollinator Garden. Thanks to our workshop leaders!



**Celebrate
with us!**

Celebrate the night sky in October 2020 during the *Hill Country Alliance's* inaugural Hill Country Night Sky Month! Bring awareness to the importance of preserving our Hill Country Night Skies.

For more information, go to

<https://www.hillcountryalliance.org/nightskymonth>

"I believe the world is incomprehensibly beautiful —
an endless prospect of magic and wonder."

Ansel Adams

Along the Trail Observations



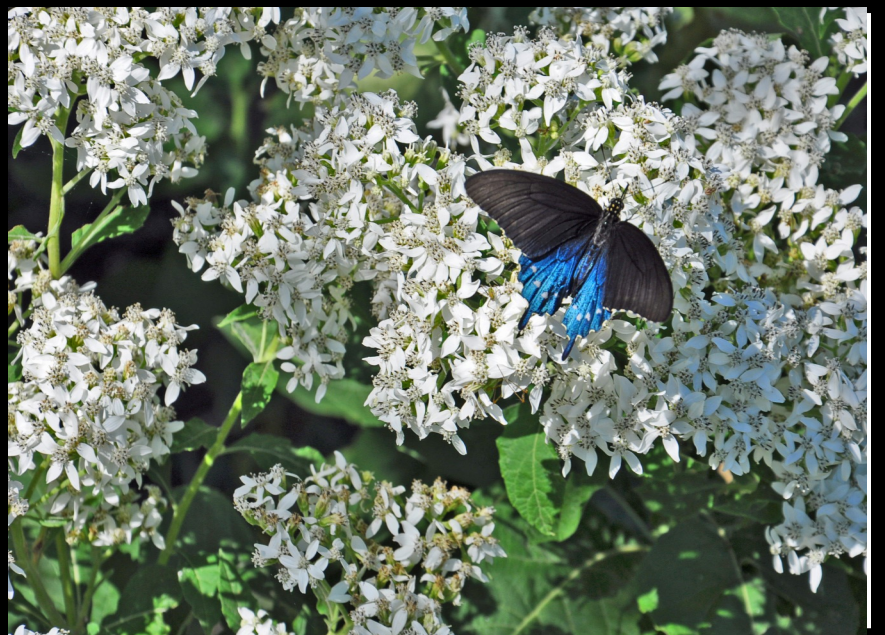
American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*)

- Deciduous, perennial shrub growing to 6'H x 6'W
- Prefers rich moist soils
- Beautiful understory plant that prefers part shade to shade
- Berries are favored food of birds
- Growing in the understory area near the Bird Blind

Photos by Lonnie Childs

Frostweed (*Verbesina virginica*) & Pipevine Swallowtail (*Battus philenor*)

- Deciduous, perennial shrub growing to 6' H x 6' W clumps of plants
- Found in oak understory
- Great fall nectar plant for butterflies, especially migrating Monarchs
- Growing in the understory area near the Bird Blind





"The goal of life is to make your heartbeat match the beat of the universe, to match your nature with Nature. "

Joseph Campbell

Along the Trail Observations

Black Vultures (*Coragyps atratus*)

These two individuals were seen warming in a dead tree on the trail adjacent to the Bird Blind. A group of vultures at roost are called a committee, so maybe these two are a sub-committee? Vultures feeding on a carcass are aptly called a wake while those in flight are a kettle. And don't call them Buzzards which are Hawks.

Black Vultures (BVs) vs Turkey Vultures (TVs)

BVs are smaller than TVs and have black faces compared to the latter's red face. When viewed in flight from below, BVs have white wing tips and a shortened tail which makes them look unbalanced. They exhibit an awkward heavy wing beat when flying that resembles "flap, flap, flap, glide." BV's have a poor sense of smell so will soar above TVs watching for them to sniff out a carcass which they will then attempt to share uninvited. BVs remain here year round as opposed to TVs who migrate to south Texas and beyond to central and south America.



Photo by Bill Lindemann

Photo by Bill Lindemann



Mexican or Bigtree Plum (*Prunus Mexicana*)

The Mexican Plum growing in the PG has produced an abundant crop of fruit this year. The plums provide a good food source for birds and mammals and are also edible by humans (tart!). In early spring, the tree is covered by creamy white flowers that emit a fragrant aroma and attract nectar bees. Mexican Plum trees are a single-trunked, non-suckering species that grows to 15-35 feet in part-shade to shade and makes for a great understory tree. It is the host plant for Tiger Swallowtails and Cecropia moths .



"I like it when a flower or a little tuft of grass grows through a crack in the concrete. It's so heroic."

George Carlin

Along the Trail Observations



Photos by Bill Lindemann

- Cardinal Flower**
(Lobelia cardinalis L)
- Growing along banks of Live Oak Creek
 - Perennial that grows top 1.5' along banks of streams and ditches—likes wet feet
 - Grows in full sun to part shade
 - Tubular flowers depend on Hummingbirds for pollination



BIRD FEEDER TIP of the MONTH



Tired of the squirrels performing acrobatic feats to eat your seed, despite buying the latest squirrel excluder. Try using pepper infused seedcakes. The squirrels hate it, & the birds don't care. A Cornell Univ. study found it 80% effective at repelling squirrels. Later studies found no ill effects for the birds who avoid the peppercorns when eating the cake.

"I go to nature to be soothed and healed,
and to have my senses put in order. "

John Burroughs

What's Flutterin' at the Pollinator Garden?

Butterflies



Two-tailed Swallowtail

Papilio multicaudata

Hoptree is a host plant

Swallowtails are largest
N. American butterflies

Photos by Bill Lindemann

Little Yellow or Sulphur
Eurema lisa



Butterflies

What's Flutterin' at the Pollinator Garden? (continued)

American Snout (*Libytheana carinenta*)

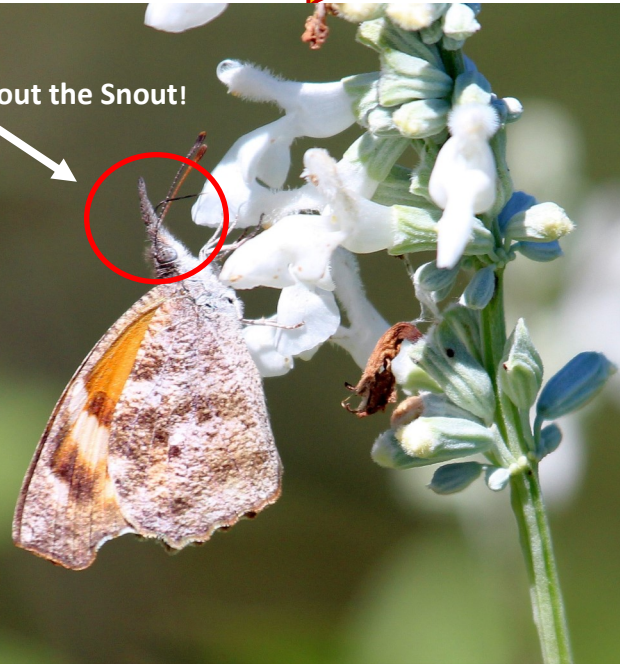
Every few years we are treated to masses of small butterflies flying about in a frenzy and committing suicide on our auto grills. October of 2020 is such a time.

Snout migrations occur from June through October, and are thought to be triggered by droughts followed by heavy summer rains. The droughts reduce a parasitoid that would otherwise limit butterfly populations, whereas the rains induce the spiny hackberry to grow new leaves which provide food for caterpillars. Whereas the droughts send the butterflies into a sort of hibernation, the rains revive them all at once to lay eggs, causing a population explosion. (Wikipedia)

However, the snout's mass directional movements are not migratory in the traditional sense, that is, north in the spring and south in the fall. There are two theories on their motivation to migrate. First, snouts move locally from patch to patch of suitable habitat that has been re-generated by the rains. Second, the migration consists of males seeking females. It could be that a combination of the two are operative. In 1921, an estimated 75 million butterflies per hour passed through South Texas in large wave that stretched for nearly 250 miles and lasted 18 days!

The purpose of the extended snout is disputed but perhaps mimics a stem and helps to disguise the butterfly as a leaf.

Check out the Snout!



AMERICAN SNOUTS

Photos by Bill Lindemann



"There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you
it's going to be a butterfly."

R. Buckminster Fuller

What's Blomen at the Pollinator Garden?

Blooms



Red Mexican Sage (*Salvia darcyi*) is a perennial that grows to 3' H x 3' W in the mountains of northern Mexico. It has low water needs, likes full sun, and will die back to its roots in the winter. It is a nectar source for Hummingbirds, Bees, and Butterflies.

All Photos by Lonnie Childs



Goldenrod (*Solidago spp.*) is a genus of about 100-120 species of flowering plants in the aster family, Asteraceae. Most are herbaceous perennial species found in open areas such as meadows, prairies, and savannas. The pictured species is growing in the PG. Another endemic species, Julia's Goldenrod (*Solidago juliae*), is currently blooming along Live Oak Lake.



"As a budding naturalist, I started out as a tree hugger and flower lover. After much study and immersion in nature, I evolved into a grass kisser."

Poa Gramen

Grasses

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

Native Grasses in a Pollinator Garden?? Absolutely! Grasses help balance the ecosystem by providing food, shelter, and nesting sites for many different pollinators. Pollinators need protection from severe weather and from predators, as well as sites for nesting and roosting. Over 70 different butterflies and moths depend on native grasses as part of their life cycles. Grasses provide the habitat for overwintering eggs, caterpillars and pupae of butterflies. Plus, native grasses are attractive, low-maintenance additions to the landscape which provide varying shapes and textures to your landscape. The larger bunch grasses have probably the highest deer resistance of any of our native plants. <https://dyckarboretum.org/native-grasses-help-pollinators/>

Here are a few grasses that we have in the Pollinator Garden.



Gulf or Pink Muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) & Seedhead

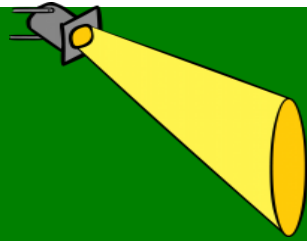


Yellow Indiangrass
(*Sorghastrum nutans*)

Big or Lindheimer's Muhly
(*Muhlenbergia lindheimeri*)



All photos by Lonnie Childs



“Service to others (or nature) is the rent you pay for your room here on earth.”

Muhammad Ali

Volunteer Spotlight: Sharon Rodriquez

Sharon is one of our longer serving, dedicated volunteers who currently serves as Board Secretary. Here is her story in her own words. Editor

I come from a long line of Connecticut Yankees. On my mom's side, my grandparents were from Austria, so it was natural to gravitate to a community like Fredericksburg which was founded by German immigrants.

When I was in college, my folks moved to the Houston area, when my dad was transferred as a GE employee to provide support for the Apollo Space Program.

I graduated from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio with a BFA degree. Eli and I met in Houston, got married, had a son and daughter, and now are thrilled to have two seven-year-old grandsons -1 in Houston and 1 in Atlanta. I went back to college when our children were little, became an accountant, and worked for a downtown Houston law firm for many years.

We bought our little piece of Fredericksburg in 1978 when our children were youngsters, hoping to expose them to the beauty of the Hill Country.

I had some success at gardening at our home in Sugarland. When we retired to Fredericksburg, I soon realized I had a lot to learn about gardening in the Hill Country. Some friends encouraged me to take the Master Naturalist class with them. I think that was in 2007. What a wonderful program it proved to be.

As part of that, I began volunteering at Lady Bird Municipal Park with Bill and Jane and others. I actually helped with the rock steps down to the creek on the trail. Some of the things I have participated in are the decorating of the Christmas float, restoring the trails as needed, keeping things hand-watered at the cactus garden, and working on the children's activities at the Wings Over the Hills Nature Festival. Presently, I am serving as Secretary and keep the minutes of the FFNC Board of Directors meetings. During my tenure at FFNC, I have enjoyed meeting a lot of nice, dedicated people who believe in trying to keep our beautiful Hill Country the treasure that it is.



Thanks Sharon!



"There is nothing in which the birds differ more from man than the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape as it was before. "

Robert Wilson Lynd

Feature: Fall Migration by Bill Lindemann

Following is an edited version of an article by Bill Lindemann reprinted from his newspaper column of the past. Editor



Fall Migration



Usually the first cold front to make it into the Hill Country is a signal to our summer bird population that they need to prepare for the trip south. Some of our summer birds, like the Purple Martins, are already in South America, but most are still here trying to store some extra fat to burn on the long flight south.

Birders know that activity over the next two months will pick up and that a good surprise may be in the offing. During spring migration, the birds are heading for their breeding grounds and normally take the more direct route. In the fall, with breeding behind them, they may wander a little along the way.

A bird that chooses to wander about in the fall is the Rufous Hummingbird. It breeds in the northwestern part of the country, but frequently makes it into our area. Look for a rusty hummer with a bright orange throat that is very feisty around the feeder or flower bed.

The problem with fall birding is that many of the birds are rather drab after undergoing a post breeding season molt. The non-breeding plumage is generally not as colorful as in the breeding plumage. The second problem is that there are many immature birds that hatched over the summer months. These birds generally are drab or show only pale coloration.

So, to the birder in the fall, the operative word is "confusion." I doubt that very many birders that took up this pastime did so in the fall. Many of the bright colorful warblers that awe the birders in the spring look alike, and identification is most difficult. With drab color causing confusion, other more subtle traits like eye rings, wing bars, tail patterns, and bill features take on extra importance in identification.

As fall approaches, we will see and hear large flocks of Sandhill Cranes passing overhead in route to the coastal areas. We are not in the major geese flyways, but occasionally some will pass through. These large birds often fly in the characteristic "V" formation. The birds have learned that in such a formation, all of them except the leader, are flying in the slip stream of air from the bird ahead, which makes flying easier. If you watch these flocks, you will notice the lead bird will rotate out of the position as he tires.

Some birds will flock up prior to departing on their journey. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, swallows, some hawks, and shorebirds are prone to fly together rather than alone. Many of these birds will roost together at night and split up during the day while searching for food.

Keep the binoculars and bird books at the ready, because the fall migration show is about to begin. The birds might not be as easy to identify as in the spring, but most birders are looking for the challenge anyway. Be patient.

Although not a bird, another beautifully winged creature, the Monarch Butterfly, will soon be migrating through the Hill Country. The Monarchs will be flying south to their wintering grounds in the Sierra Madres in



*"A bird does not sing because it has an answer.
It sings because it has a song."*

Chinese Proverb

Feature: Fall Migration by Bill Lindemann (continued)

Mexico. Coincidental with the bird migration, these butterflies do add color as they waft along on the breezes. The Monarch is a large rusty-colored butterfly with heavy dark veins and white spots in their wings.

What is migration?

Migration is the cyclic or periodic travel of an animal as it returns eventually to its original place of departure. Migration is often annual and is closely linked with the cyclic pattern of the seasons.

Why do birds migrate?

There are a number of explanations for migration. Birds migrate to: (1) areas where food is more abundant, (2) there is less competition for nesting space, (3) the climate is milder, or (4) the daylight hours are longer (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department).

For more information on Bird Migration, check out:

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/birding/migration/faq/>



Fall Migration Events to Look for in October:

- **Canada Geese**—Flying south in V formations until late October
- **Sandhill Cranes**—Flying south in V formation. Can be distinguished from Geese by the long legs trailing behind them. Migration period is the 2nd half of October. At least one population winters in northeastern Gillespie County.
- **Hawk Kettles**—Mostly Swainson Hawks fly though which are large bodied & broad-winged. In late October to early November, large numbers of hawks can be seen drifting south on northerly winds until they hit a thermal updraft at which point they will soar upwards in a circular motion to gain elevation & then begin drifting south again. You can occasionally catch them roosting on the ground overnight in fields where they will feast on grasshoppers.
- **Monarch Butterflies** are passing through now!



**Venture out to our Bird Blind for the chance to see
an unusual migrant taking a break!**



*"If we encounter a man of rare intellect,
we should ask him what books he reads."*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Book Review by Lonnie Childs



THE NATURAL HISTORY OF TEXAS

Brian R. Chapman and Eric G. Bolen

Texas A&M University Press, 2018

390 pages, \$50 Hardcover



The Natural History of Texas takes on the ambitious challenge of describing the diverse natural state of Texas with its twelve natural regions spanning 269,000 square miles of habitat from the Great Plains to the subtropics and from the East Texas Piney Woods to the Chihuahuan Desert.

The scope and breadth of the book limit the depth that the authors might delve into any particular subject or region, and yet they have done an excellent job of balance in providing an enormous array of information in an innovative format. The target audience for the book ranges from the accomplished amateur naturalist to the aspiring naturalist in providing a comprehensive sampler of Texas natural history from which the reader might choose to delve more extensively in other readings.

The introductory chapter begins with a well-crafted exploration of the early naturalists who roamed Texas in the 19th and early 20th centuries and served to define the seminal natural history of Texas. The authors then proceed to frame a discussion on how ecological boundaries were originally established which concludes with an explanation of their use of a modified version of Gould's natural regions of Texas. The chapter includes a clarion call on the current challenges to our natural resources (mostly human induced) while also underscoring that in the latter 20th century the natural sciences have been consistently de-funded and increasingly denigrated as "soft sciences", not producing the commercial or quantitative outcomes of other scientific disciplines. They finish the chapter with recognition of natural history focused organizations (ex. National Audubon Society) who provide trained naturalists (i.e. citizen scientists) to supplement academically trained scientists in gathering data (ex. Christmas Bird Counts – kudos to Birders!) and furthering the cause of protecting our endangered natural resources.

Each of the eleven succeeding chapters focuses on one of the natural regions of Texas and explores the flora, fauna and geology of the region. Beginning with an overview of the region, the region is then divided into its major vegetative zones with an overview of the flora, fauna, and major topographical features of that zone. The authors do a wonderful job of proffering a diverse range of material without overwhelming the reader, mostly by highlighting what is unique to that zone. They also offer short atypical sections on highlighted topics particular to that region such as finding the fossil bones of California Condors in the Trans-Pecos or the Lost Maples, a relict species in the Hill Country. These sections provide fun facts with which to regal your



"Always read something that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it."

P.J. O'Rourke

Book Review by Lonnie Childs (continued)

friends with your personal knowledge. Each chapter concludes with an important synopsis of the conservation threats and challenges particular to that natural region.

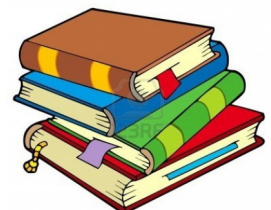
Peppered throughout the book, "Infoboxes" tender interesting information on subjects ancillary to the main narrative of exploring the natural resources of that particular region. For example, in the introductory chapter, the "Infoboxes" provide biographical vignettes of some of the major naturalists who contributed to the current body of knowledge about Texas natural history. The "Infoboxes" can be read as the reader progresses through the chapter or read independently at a later time, as the "Readings and References" section at the conclusion of the book provides a handy reference to their location.

The authors conclude the book with other handy reference tools that are both comprehensive and easy to use. Appendix A offers a listing with a species description of the official natural symbols of Texas (ex. State bird, Mockingbird). Appendix B provides a listing of species (presumably those referenced in the book?) by common name with accompanying scientific names, and a Glossary of terms follows. The authors organized the "Readings and References" section in an innovative fashion by eschewing specific footnotes and instead listing the source references under the chapter/section headings in the book. I think the technique works effectively as a way to quickly review the reference material that maps to a topic of interest to the reader, even at a later date.

In summary, I find this book a great addition to the Texas naturalist's library. The authors have creatively organized the vast array of Texas natural history in a manner that is enjoyable and not overwhelming. The well written text can be consumed in one continuous reading, or the reader might choose to consume it one chapter individually over time. Additionally, the book serves as a handy reference to be utilized when a particular topic piques your interest or memory at a later date. The authors' big ambitions were matched by their noble effort in performing a great service to Texas natural history with the release of this book. I'll end with one of their highlighted quotes, *"It may be the naturalists who save us in the end, by bringing us all back down to earth."* (Robert Michael Pyle, 2001) So study up naturalists, your mission lies before you.



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"Nature is not a place to visit. It is home."

Gary Snyder



A Bee's Eye View of a Cactus Bloom

Photo by Lonnie Childs

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