

# Fredericksburg Nature Notes



## Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

July, 2021 Volume 2 Number 7

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com/>

### Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

What a strange year when you consider the weather, although strange is kind of becoming normal. We had the record-setting freeze in February which upset the normal spring re-vegetation cycles. It took many weeks for the Oaks to finally reveal their fate. Now we have 3-4 inches of welcome rain in the first week of July. The spring flowers are exhausted, but the grasses and "weeds" are enjoying the combination of additional moisture and fierce sunshine to "grow like weeds" as the saying goes (see page 8 about our riparian grasses). Green is good in July. What's next?

In this issue, we have another great guest article by Virginia Sawin about a cute night-time visitor to her home. We also feature one of Bill Lindemann's wonderful articles from his newspaper catalogue that highlights the crooning ability and unique behavior of our state bird, the Northern Mockingbird, who does a more than adequate job at bringing attention to himself.

Beyond that, we feature Kissing Bugs, Brown Boobys, bounteous blooms, and a plethora of pollinating at the Pollinator Garden and Butterfly Habitat. The temps are warming, but the rains have delayed the summer doldrums, so come out and enjoy the prolonged spring.

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”**

## **Volunteer Work at FNC**

**Our weekly work sessions continue. Following is an update on some of the current projects.**

**Butterfly Habitat:** We have completed fencing off the back section of the garden to block a well used deer path into the garden. The added panels will at least force the deer to walk around to get their meal! It will also serve as trellis for growing some native vines.

**Pollinator Garden:** The battle against the ubiquitous and ever invasive Bermuda grass continues. You never quite win the war against this noxious invasive, but you try to win the battle each year. We are using a solarization technique in one portion of the garden that has proven to be an effective tactic.



**Patti Guin battling the Bermuda grass at the Pollinator Garden.**



**Trudy Eberhardt carries off a bucket of the unwelcome Bermuda.**

**Trails:** We will working in the coming weeks to add wayfinding signs along the trails to better direct our hikers and hopefully to discourage them from cutting make-shift trails between areas which lead to habitat destruction and erosion.

**Photos by Lonnie Childs**

**Tuesday Fundays are always on!** We gather every **Tuesday at 8:30am** in summer near Pavilion #1 to split up into work parties on the trails, gardens, or the Bird Blind. Typical tasks involve gardening skills and trail maintenance, but no experience is necessary. Use it as a learning opportunity. Work in whatever area you choose for as long as you choose. We work some and have a lot of fun outside in the beauty of nature. It's both good exercise for the body and good for the soul.

**Contact Gracie Waggener at [gwaggener@flow-apps.com](mailto:gwaggener@flow-apps.com) to receive a weekly email notification.**



**"Don't worry when you are not recognized, but strive to be worthy of recognition."**

**Abraham Lincoln**

## Save the Date!

**Mark down *Saturday, September 25th*, on your calendar as a day to be reserved. FFNC will be holding a recognition event for Bill Lindemann, Founder and President of the Friends organization for the past 20 years.**

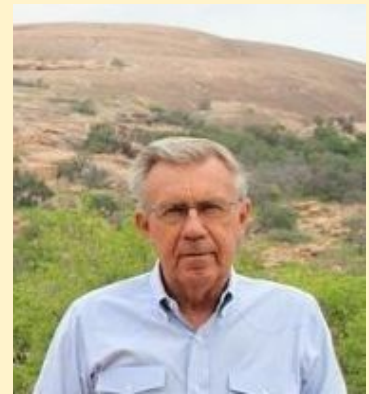
**Time: 5:00—8:00 pm tentatively**

**Place: Gilbriar Gazebo**

***Beverages and heavy Appetizers to be served.***

***Plan to be there and honor Bill.***

***Look for more information to follow in the future.***



**Kissing Bugs**—As naturalists, we normally are teaching people, especially children, not to be afraid of insects. But this is one that you truly want to avoid. Bill Lindemann reports killing 15 individuals on his porch recently, so they are active in the area.

**Triatomine bugs (also called "kissing bugs", cone-nosed bugs, and blood suckers)** can live indoors, in cracks and holes of substandard housing, or in a variety of outdoor settings including beneath porches, rocky structures or concrete, in rock or brush piles, and in dog houses or chicken coops.

**Distribution:** They are typically found in the southern United States, Mexico, Central America, and South America **including Gillespie County.** There are 11 species in the southern US.

**Why are Kissing Bugs a problem?** They carry *Trypanosoma cruzi*, the parasite that causes Chagas disease.

The transmission of the *T. cruzi* parasite from a bug to a human is not easy. The parasite that causes the disease is in the bug feces. The bug generally poops on or near a person while it is feeding on their blood, usually when the person is sleeping. Transmission of the parasite happens when poop is accidentally rubbed into the bite wound or into a mu-

cous membrane (for example, the eye or mouth), and the parasite enters the body. The notion that they might bite you near your mouth provides their name, although they might bite you anywhere.

**Chagas Disease** has an "acute phase" where the victim may experience multiple symptoms within weeks or months. The "chronic phase" may not exhibit symptoms for years which can be serious to fatal.

***Triatoma sanguisuga***



**Source: Center for Disease Control**





**“ Animals are sentient, intelligent, perceptive, funny and entertaining. We owe them a duty of care as we do to children.”**

**Michael Morpurgo**

## **Guest Article: Ringtail in the Rafters by Virginia Sawin, PhD**

Early this summer, our dog Amber (young Vizsla), wanted out the door to the back patio, then proceeded to bark furiously at something on the rafters over the patio. I assumed she had “treed” Molly the cat again. Looking up, I saw the most charming face looking down and further back hanging down, a long bushy black and white banded tail!

Our visitor was a Texas Ring-tailed Cat!

We took pictures and went back inside hoping to see the creature come down and get more photos! Somehow, it managed to escape without having its picture taken again.

Following up on the Internet, Texas Parks and Wildlife/Huntwild/wild/species has a more complete description, including Life History and Habitat.

Texas is home to the Ringtail Cat (*Bassariscus astutus*). Wikipedia lists this creature as a relative to the Raccoon family and found in the Southern United

States from Oregon and California throughout the southwestern states to Texas. It is not related to the Cat family. Their closest relatives are Raccoons, which may suggest some of their behavior. Like humans, they are omnivores, but primarily carnivorous. Their diet includes small vertebrates, berries, fruits, cactus and probably anything else that holds still. They have two to four cubs in a litter and their lifespan is about seven years.

They can be domesticated and are reputed to make good pets. There are ads on the Internet for the sale of ringtails as pets. Settlers and miners were reputed to have kept ringtails as pets to rid their homes and mines of rats and mice.

Apparently, Ringtails are considered a problem by some as there are several websites for “Removal” agencies. In Texas homes and other buildings, they are frequently considered pests. Several removal services are listed in both Austin and San Antonio. According to their ads, the presence of ring-tails is on the increase in the Austin/San Antonio area. “Ring Tail Cat Removal” of Cen-Tex Services in Austin TX. has additional information on the behavior of these “cats”. <http://www.centexwildlifecontrol.com/ring-tail-cat.html>

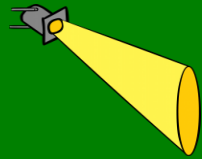
But who could resist that face!



**Photo by Virginia Sawin**

### **References:**

- tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/species/rtail/
- En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ring-tailed cat



## Volunteer Spotlight

### Trudy Eberhardt in a Nutshell—Preferably an Acorn

*Trudy is one of our newer volunteers, but has already shown off her skills and versatility in building trails, maintaining gardens, or helping wherever is needed. Her life story demonstrates those same attributes and how she developed them. Editor*

I am not a resident of Fredericksburg, but live just down the road and was drawn to the Lady Bird park and gardens after moving to the Hill Country in October, 2019, from Albuquerque, NM. I loved the dry southwest climate of New Mexico for almost 40 years, but longed to get out of the city and back to a more rural lifestyle in a place with more water. We found it here on the southern Gillespie County border on a ridge north of Kerrville off Harper Road. I had heard about the Texas Master Naturalist training right after we got here, but then the pandemic cancelled the 2020 session. I graduated from the 2021 class in May and have already volunteered enough hours to be recertified this year by maintaining gardens, digging for archeological points and tools, water testing, and cleaning up roads and rivers.

My life so far has been the result of the influence of other people. My parents were the first and most important influencers, but I almost didn't come to be. After my only other sibling was born, they tried, but it took seven years before I showed up, and no other children appeared after me. I was born in Philadelphia, PA to an Austrian emigrant father and "native" Philadelphian mother. We moved to a New Jersey suburb when I was four, and I spent most of my spare time roaming the woods on the outskirts of the nice new housing development that used to be a farm. I felt more at home in nature than with other kids and climbed many trees and slogged in the stream while looking for fish and crawling critters. I swam on a team in the summers and played lots of sports in school.

My sister was the next big influence, when her husband was transferred to a Hawaii naval base just as I finished four years of college in New Hampshire as an art student. They paid my way to Hawaii in exchange for watching their two young boys while crossing the country in their car. I saw the Grand Canyon, Black Hills, Yellowstone and much more between the two coasts before landing in Waikiki, Island of Oahu.

The next influence turned out to be two girls from Canada, because while painting the night red with them in Waikiki, I met Franz Wuerz who lived on his 37 foot trimaran. I ended up spending the next 30 years with him. He was originally from Germany, born in 1937, but he moved to and grew up in Delaware after the war. He joined the US Air Force and was trained in servo-systems and electronics. After leaving the service, he





*"Research has shown that people who volunteer often live longer."*

Allen Klein

## Volunteer Spotlight: Trudy Eberhardt (cont'd)

built two boats in California and sailed his Jim Brown designed trimaran to Hawaii in the 70's. We had many adventures together on the boat and on motorcycles from the 70s to the 90s. I still ride a KTM Duke 690 with my current husband, Paul Cassel, whom I met a couple years after Franz crashed on his motorcycle in an attempt to ride down the east coast in 2004 by himself. My father and beloved Black Lab died the same year.

So back to 1975 – Franz and I sailed around the Hawaiian islands and worked on Oahu before starting a small business with a partner on Molokai for three years. While there, I met Bill Mollison, the creator of Permaculture, and even cooked him dinner and got to know him. I also carved signs for local businesses and created sculptures and painted watercolors while working as a business manager. Franz loved the wind and wanted to design wind turbines but his partner wasn't interested. They did create a second company for engineering services when a man bought the wind rights on Molokai Ranch and wanted to put up wind turbines designed by others, at a time when the industry was very new and the wind generators were on a smaller scale than they are now. We put up three turbines but nothing really came of it.

After six years in Hawaii, I felt too far from my family on the east coast, so we moved to Burkburnett, Texas in 1981 to help maintain wind turbines designed by Jay Carter. At an earlier wind energy conference in Hawaii, we met a Pennsylvanian who invited us to move to Albuquerque a year later where Franz could design and build a new vertical axis wind turbine. The company went public and put up turbines in Palm Springs, CA, but when President Reagan ended the tax credits for investors in non-fossil fuel energy generation, the company went bankrupt after five years. I was the first and last employee of the company with my last position held being Controller.

The business on Molokai and the wind turbine company in New Mexico gave me the opportunity to learn office management and become an accountant, but I needed a business degree to compete after the bankruptcy, so we moved to Roswell and I attended ENMU. In the summer before my schooling started, we kayaked over 100 miles around the San Juan Islands in Washington State. The natural beauty of the islands and the twelve foot tides and currents during full moon will never be forgotten.

After three years of working and getting a business degree, we both went to work for a bus manufacturing



Painting by Trudy Eberhardt





*"We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."*  
**Winston Churchill**

## Volunteer Spotlight: Trudy Eberhardt (cont'd)

company in Roswell, until Jay Carter invited us back to Texas. I worked as his Controller until my desire to study for the CPA exam drew us back to New Mexico and Franz decided to retire. We spent a summer by a lake while I studied, then I took the CPA exam in the fall and passed all five parts. We moved back to Albuquerque, and I went to work for the largest plant nursery in New Mexico. I joined a management accounting association, and the next big influence in my life was a fellow member and employment recruiter who helped me land a job as Controller of a new water disinfection company. I ran the accounting department for eleven years.



**Wood Carving by Trudy Eberhardt**

While working there, I used another employment recruiter to find accounting employees for my department, and she subsequently found a company looking for someone to start a new accounting department for a solar racking company that had been sold to "green" investors. I jumped at that opportunity which eventually paid for my retirement. At that time, I started training for and swimming around Key West every June for three years. The company was sold to Hilti Corporation after six years, and I decided to leave at that time. In order to give back, I took a year off to regroup and then became Director of Finance and CFO of a non-profit that helped people with disabilities. After six years of helping the CEO create a much larger and financially healthy company, I retired.

My husband found out about Kerrville while looking for a place that met all our retirement requirements on line. We spent a week visiting the area in July, 2019, while I was still working but on vacation, and we bought the house we now live in before moving here a few months later. I have stayed very busy since then—creating my own gardens, renovating a carving studio, digging with the Hill Country Archeology Association, cleaning up after hail storms and the Big Freeze, learning all about the hill country flora and fauna, and adopting an eight year old German Shepherd (who has me well trained to go to the river every day). I still plan to do all that art work I had planned to do when I retired. I am a member of the Riverside Nature Center, Hill Country Archeology Association, NPSOT and a certified Hill Country Texas Master Naturalist. I learn something new every day and hope to keep giving back for a long time.

**Thanks Trudy! You too can volunteer at FFNC!**



*"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 Along Live Oak Lake



**Eastern Gamagrass**  
*Tripsacum dactyloides*



**Canada Wild Rye**  
*Elymus canadensis*



**Johnson Grass**  
*Sorghum halepense*



Photos by Lonnie Childs

Grasses are some of our least appreciated vegetation, yet some of our most important. They are builders and anchors of the soil and particularly along stream banks, they are the keepers of the bank. Some "bunchgrasses" such as those above can grow roots as deep as they stand tall. Persistent mowing or grazing to the ground will ensure their demise (the rule is "take half, leave half"). The stand above features mostly Eastern Gamagrass which is the most prized of the bunchgrasses due its forage value and anchoring capacity. Canada Wild Rye provides good nesting material and seed feed for birds and small mammals. Johnson Grass, a non-native, was introduced from Asia & northern Africa into the southern US in the 1830's and is now considered a noxious invasive.





**"One-eighth of the (bird) species alive today are in danger of disappearing in the near future."**

**Bernd Brunner**

## Bird Bits



Photo by  
Lonnie Childs

### Purple Martin News

Earlier in the year, the Board debated about whether to add another Martin House. Our decision at the time was to wait and see whether the existing house filled up this spring. The Purple Martins listened and inhabited nearly all of the available apartments this spring. Fortuitously, we have recently received a \$1000 donation from an anonymous donor to be applied towards the purchase of a second Purple Martin house. By next spring, the chatter of the Purple Martins should grow even louder.

### Rare Bird Alert

#### Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)

Brown Boobys are large seabirds that typically inhabit tropical regions around the world. Its' yellow feet distinguish it from its cousins—the Blue-footed and Red-footed Boobys. Although it is a tropical bird, it is known to occasionally venture north to inland regions. A Brown Booby has been reported at Canyon Lake this spring and recently on private property near Grapetown, probably the same bird. Vacationing?



Photo courtesy  
of Wikipedia

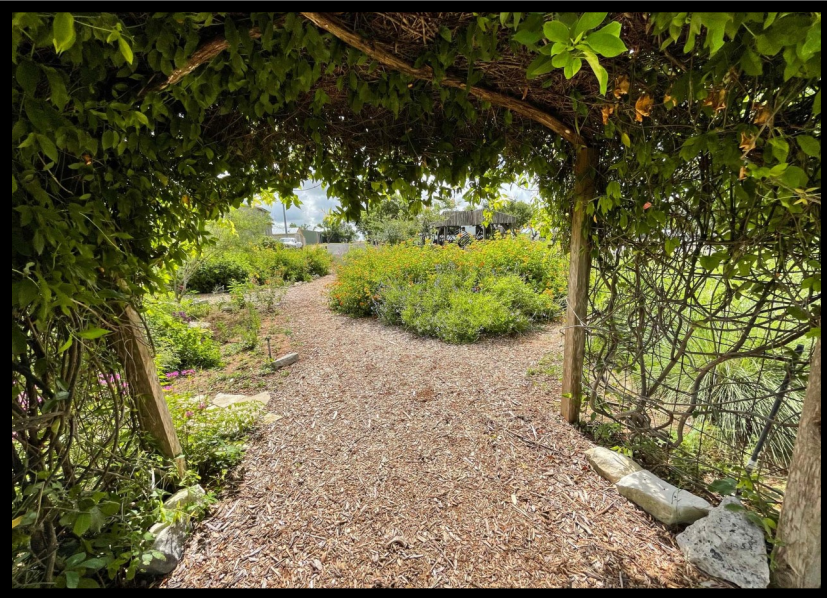




*"I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order."*  
John Burroughs

## What's Blumen at the Pollinator Garten?

# Blooms!



Walk through the Crossvine Arbor at the Pollinator Garden and be met with one of various medleys of flowers including Lantana, Mealy Blue Sage, and one Sunflower overseeing it all.

American Basketflower  
*Centaurea americana*  
With an unidentified Pollinator



Photos by Lonnie Childs



"In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt."

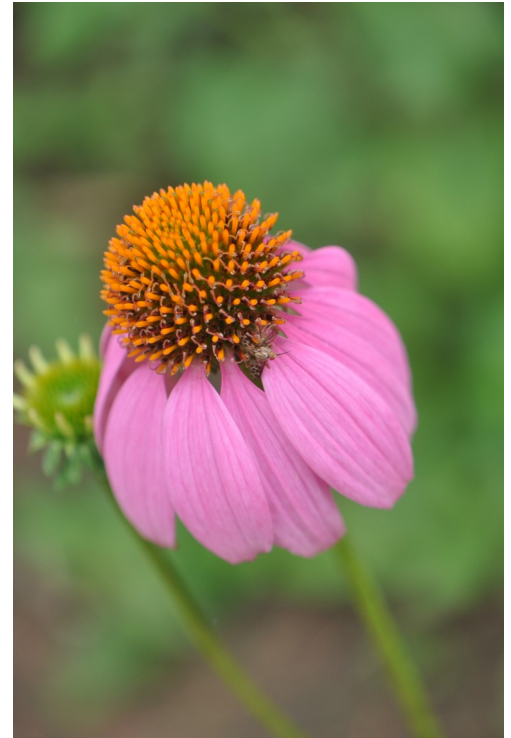
Margaret Atwood

## What's Blumen at the Pollinator Garten?

## Blooms!



**Purple Milkweed Vine**  
*Matelea biflora*



**Purple Coneflower**  
*Echinacea purpurea*



**Lemon Beebalm or  
Purple Horsemint**  
*Monarda citriodora*



**Scarlet or Tropical**  
*Salvia coccinea*

Photos by  
Lonnie Childs



# What's Flutterin' & Crawlin' in the Pollinator Garden? **Insects!**



Photo by Bill Lindemann

Goatweed Leafspring

*Anaea andria*

Common Wood Nymph

*Cercyonis pegala*



Photo by Bill Lindemann



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Variegated Fritillary Larva

*Euptoieta claudia*

on Indian Mallow



*"If you listen to birds, every day will have a song in it."*  
Kyo Maclear

## Feature Story: Northern Mockingbird

By Bill Lindemann

*Note: This article was reprinted from one of Bill's one thousand columns that he wrote for the Kerrville Daily Times and the Fredericksburg Standard Radio-Post.*

Sometimes we take for granted the common birds around us and tend to ignore them. However, ignoring this bird is not easy, because it is both noisy and assertive to all creatures that share his domain. Some small, quiet birds, such as Kinglets and Bushtits, can go practically unnoticed even if they live in our immediate surroundings. Mockingbirds show little fear of humans, pets, and other neighborhood birds.

Whoever chose the mockingbird as our state bird may have considered that his loud, bold and aggressive behavior fits with the persona of Texans. Four other states also chose the mockingbird as their state bird, but possibly for different reasons. The Northern Mockingbird can be found in all of our 254 counties, perhaps another reason for his selected honor. The Mockingbird prefers woodlands, brush, stream, or arroyo habitat, but has no problem with being an urbanite.

Even though his demeanor is colorful, his plumage can be best described as shades of gray and white. The white is very visible as wing patches and large spots in his outer tail feathers. His long tail is often cocked, a signal that he is on alert and telling others around him to take notice. His light eye color is part of a face that seems to always have a "stern" look. Loggerhead Shrikes might be confused with Mockingbirds to new birders, but Shrikes have black wings, masks and tails. Additionally, Shrike wing beats are much more rapid than those of a Mockingbird.

Mockingbirds are in the same family as Gray Catbirds and Thrashers and the only resident Mockingbird in the country. Occasionally, a Blue Mockingbird will show up in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and a Bahama Mockingbird might show up in Florida on occasions. A Tropical Mockingbird has appeared in the Sabine Woods Nature Sanctuary south of Port Arthur in the past, an appearance that caused a big stir among birders around the country. It proved to be a hot, controversial topic of discussion regarding how this tropical bird made it to Texas for the first time.



Photo by Bill Lindemann



***“Nature is an endless combination and repetition of a very few laws.”***  
***Ralph Waldo Emerson***

## **Feature Story: Northern Mockingbird (cont'd)**

A common occurrence in the spring breeding season is to hear a mockingbird go on a singing binge. This serenade might last for more than 24 hours. The consensus of ornithologists is that the reason for the sing-a-thon is that he is looking for a mate. While in full song, he will lift up straight up for a few feet before settling back on his perch without missing a beat in his song. When I was young and living in a house without air-conditioning and with windows open all night, these singing sessions just outside my bedroom window were very annoying to me. I just wanted to sleep.

Mockingbirds are also very well known for their ability to sing other birds' songs, or better yet, copy other sounds such as whistles, sirens, and wood saws. This ability has led to their being called “mimics.” Dr. Kent Rylander in his book, *The Behavior of Texas Birds*, takes exception to this analogy that these birds are mimicking other bird's songs. He concludes that mimicry, strictly speaking, implies deception as well as a benefit to the mimic that results from the deception. Since the bird is not trying to deceive other animals, he is merely appropriating other bird's sounds into his repertoire. Whatever the explanation might be, I can assure you that he is a great appropriator.

Mockingbirds are fearless and harass any possible perceived predator to discourage them from getting too close to his family nest. Similarly, he takes on the “guard dog” attitude when protecting a berry tree from other hungry birds. His attitude might be, “this is my territory; enter at your own peril.” In the bird world, aggression often decides the winner of a dispute. Northern Mockingbirds understand this premise and make it work for them.



Photo by Bill Lindemann

**A Northern Mockingbird expresses his upset at a much larger Swainson's Hawk perching on a Cholla that the Mockingbird considers part of his domain**

### *Listen to the Mockingbird*



**To hear the melodious song of the Northern Mockingbird, Right Click [Here](#)**

**“Open Hyperlink”**

**Click on the “Listen” button.**





**"Birds have always had the ability to bring me out of a dark space and provide relief in bad times."**

**Jason Ward**

## Feature: (cont'd)

### More Mockingbird Factoids

- Its' scientific name is *Mimus polyglottus* which translates to the "many-tongued mimic"
- In the 19th century, people kept so many mockingbirds as singing cage birds that the birds nearly vanished on the East Coast
- They continue to add new sounds to their repertoires throughout their lives. A male may learn around 200 songs throughout its life. There is also a study that posits that there are Mockingbird dialects in different locales.
- Known for its intelligence, a 2009 study showed that the bird was able to recognize individual humans, particularly repeat intruders or threats. Birds recognize their breeding spots and return to areas in which they had greatest success in previous years
- They are omnivores with a diet of arthropods, earthworms, berries, fruits, seeds, and lizards.
- Their range stretches across the southern half of the US from coast to coast.

Sources: All About Birds & Wikipedia



Photo courtesy of Wikipedia

manjith\_kalickara

**Breeding display of a male.**

## Bird Feeder Tip of the Month

### Clean Your Feeders Regularly

Clean feeders and rake up spilled grain and hulls  
Uneaten seed can become soggy and grow deadly mold. Empty and clean feeders twice a year (spring and fall), or more often if feeders are used during humid summers. Using a long-handled bottlebrush, scrub with dish detergent and rinse with a powerful hose; then soak in a bucket of 10 percent non-chlorine bleach solution, rinse well, and dry in the sun. In early spring, rake up spilled grain and sunflower hulls.

Source: Audubon.org

For more tips, go to

<https://www.audubon.org/news/11-tips-feeding-backyard-birds>





*"I like this place and could willingly waste my time in it."*

William Shakespeare

Go to our website for online renewal or print & mail our membership form.



Crossvine  
*Bignonia capreolata*  
By Lonnie Childs

**Please consider continuing to support FFNC.**

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