

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

October, 2021 Volume 2 Number 10

<http://fredericksburgNaturecenter.com>

Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

Some recent rains, cooler weather, and the fall bird migration have enlivened the nature center. Ospreys and Zone-tailed Hawks soaring overhead coupled with outbursts of Goldenrod and Maximilian Sunflowers along with solitary Cardinal flowers leaning from streambanks will make your spirits soar too and put a little more color in your demeanor. The skeptical may scoff that I am merely waxing poetically, but personal experience argues otherwise. Go take a hike on the trail or visit the gardens and find out for yourselves.

Our volunteers have been busy tidying up the gardens and completing the installation of the Butterfly Bench. The bench sits ready for those great family photos that capture not only an image but also the experience of visiting FNC and will trigger that memory at a future viewing. We hope that families will not just stop for a photo but will also avail themselves of all that FNC has to offer.

Finally, we hope that you will enjoy and learn from some of the photos of flora and fauna that Mother Nature presented to us of late.. We welcome Dot Maginot as a contributing photographer who will provide new perspective and increased capacity to capture Mother Nature at her best.



Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

In this issue:

- **Volunteers and Projects**
- **Observations Along the Trail**
- **Volunteer Spotlight—Nita Hazle**
- **Bushy-tailed Rodents**
- **What's Flutterin' and Crawlين' at the Pollinator Garten**
- **Some Avian Friends**
- **Feature Story: Humming All the Way to Panama**





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”

Volunteers and Projects at FNC

If you have visited the **Pollinator Garden** lately, you will notice a bare spot which a large thicket of Lantana and Mealy Blue Sage previously inhabited. Look across the aisle, and you will find plenty remains of these aggressive species. As often happens with any tall species growing in an advantageous habitat, they will gleefully take more than their fair share of space, snuffing out the lesser botanical denizens. Hence, the fair-minded gardener intervenes to put the aggressive interlopers back in their place. Gracie and crew have surgically removed some of the Lantana and Mealy Blue Sage to allow space for some shorter wildflower species to thrive. Look for some new varieties of floral eye candy in the future.

After many Tuesdays, the **Trail Crew** has finally completed installation of the new **Butterfly Bench** in the wildflower meadow near the parking area. This piece of ornamental art provides a pleasing setting for the all-important “selfie” photo opportunity which dominates modern life. We will be working on restoring some of the wildflower diversity in the meadow which will decorate the background of some great family photos. We have a bit of an ulterior motive. If we can get families to stop for their “selfie”, then maybe they will continue down the trail to see the Butterfly Habitat and Bird Blind for starters. Then who know, that might just result in a hike down the trail for some real adventure and a wild experience. Let the Butterfly Bench do its magic!

Speaking of volunteers, we have many areas requiring volunteers within FFNC. We have tasks that do not involve manual labor at FNC. For example, **Dot Maginot** has agreed to be a contributing photographer to our newsletter. Watch for her wonderful photos throughout this issue. Maybe someone out there has an itch to write? We always need guest articles to provide some diversity in our content. Send them to me!

Notice what these two Lauras have in common despite their hard work. They’re two smiling Lauras! Thanks to Laura Grant (L) and Laura King (R). Photos by Dot Maginot.





"Photography is a way of feeling, of touching, of loving. What you have caught on film is captured forever. It remembers little things, long after you have forgotten everything."

Aaron Siskind

The Butterfly Bench is Open!

Thanks to the Trail Crew for their hard work!

Frank Garcia, Billy Guin, Tom Hynes, Carl Luckenbach, Tom Musselman, Mary Ellen Terrell, and Lonnie Childs



Photo by Dot Maginot



Photo by Lonnie Childs

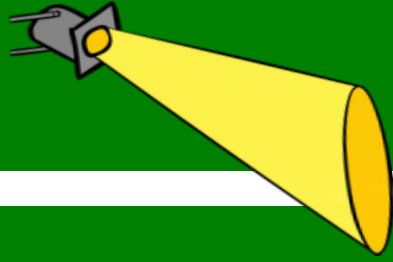
The
**BUTTERFLY
BENCH**
is Now Open
for your Selfies
at No charge!

↔

Your Donation
Dollars at Work.

Tuesday Fundays at FNC are always on! We gather every **Tuesday at 8:30am** 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 good exercise for the body and great therapy for the soul.

Contact Gracie Waggener at gwaggener@flow-apps.com to receive a weekly email notification.



Volunteer Spotlight

Nita Hazle

Nita has become a valued volunteer in the Butterfly Habitat. Here is her story in her own words.

My interest in nature began early. As a child growing up in England, I was a backyard birdwatcher. I always felt most at home wandering in the woods. Even though our home was filled with magazines and books about nature, as a young adult, it never occurred to me that it was something I could pursue as some sort of study or career. I don't recall any of my high school biology and other science classes having anything to do with the natural world. My worst grades were in science classes ironically, since I consider myself a science nerd.

That all changed in my late twenties when I saw a notice in the Dallas newspaper that the Dallas Museum of Natural History was looking for docents. I didn't even know what a docent was, but I followed up on that little breadcrumb. I discovered that there were people making a living teaching people about nature. I got a job with an environmental consulting firm, as a contractor (essentially a file clerk) at the EPA, working in the upper floors of one of the tallest skyscrapers (as they were called then) in downtown Dallas (more irony). I soon went back to college enrolling at Texas A&M in the department of wildlife and fisheries, planning to focus on environmental education. In my last year of classes, I took a course in animal behavior and my path veered in a different direction. Long story short, after completing my BS at TAMU, I went on to get a masters degree at the University of Texas, focusing on ornithology and behavioral ecology in the Zoology dept.

I moved to Fredericksburg in 2008 from Driftwood, Texas near Austin. I moved here to take care of my mother and was fortunate to be able to bring my job with me. I was an adjunct professor in biology at Austin Community College and St. Edwards University. At the time, ACC had a Fredericksburg center, so I continued teaching biology courses here. The best part of teaching here was that I was able to incorporate field trips into my courses. The Fredericksburg Nature Center was one of the locations we visited. I was thrilled when I discovered a colony of leaf-cutter ants on the site, since their "farming" ecology was something I had been teaching in classes for years.

Shortly after moving here I went through the Master Naturalist training program and became acquainted with the local community of people interested in the natural world, including members of NPSOT, Friends of Enchanted Rock, and Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center. One of the activities that I volunteered with was the annual 3rd grade day. I was stationed in the woodlands, where we encouraged the kids to open their senses and see what they could discover and learn from the nature around them.

My abiding focus is ecology – how everything is connected to everything else by one or more degrees, and the important implication of this being that in any interaction with nature, you can never do just one thing. If we take the time to really pay attention to what's happening, nature has much to teach us.

Volunteering at the FNC puts me in a position to do just that. I love it when the unexpected shows up. It happens just about every time.





*"You can visit the same trail twice,
but you'll never take the same hike."*

Anonymous

Observations Along the Trail

Photo by Lonnie Childs



American Beautyberry

Callicarpa americana

B'berry grows on the eastern edge of the Edwards Plateau. It's stunning berries & attractive foliage make it a must have in a shady spot of your garden. This specimens is planted near the Butterfly Habitat.

Photo by Lonnie Childs



Palafoxia *Palafoxia callosa*

Walking on the sandstone bluff on the Vista Loop Trail, look down or you will miss this small pink flower on its spindly, sparsely leaved stalk of 1-2 ft. It annually re-seeds in gravelly, sandy soils and thrives in xeric conditions. It belongs to the Aster family (Composites) but contains only disk flowers.

Photo by Dot Maginot



Blue-fronted Dancer Damselfly

Argia apicalis

A common, well-studied species that was captured sunning on the sandstone bluffs. Its striped thorax goes through changing color phases, seemingly related to age. The creek below the dam is an excellent to see Odonates (Dragonflies and Damselflies).



"An early morning walk is a blessing for the whole day." –

Henry David Thoreau

Observations Along the Trail



Maximilian Sunflower *Helianthus maximiliana*

A perennial that reaches to 6 ft & colonizes on prairies or in roadside ditches. The photo at right shows it leaning over the creek. Uniquely for a sunflower, its flowers grow in the axils of the stalk & each stalk sports several blooms.

Flame-leaf Sumac

Rhus lanceolata

This small tree grows from 15-30 ft tall & is well populated along fences. It provides beautiful gold & red foliage in the fall, back-lit by the setting sun. The clusters of sticky berries provide excellent nutrition for birds. A Vitamin C rich tea can be made from the berries. Check it out at Michigan State Univ. Extension.

Right click [HERE](#)

Open Hyperlink.



Photos by Lonnie Childs



"Squirrels are just rats with good publicity."

Garrison Wynn

Bushy-tailed Rodents aka Squirrels



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Fox Squirrel

Sciurus niger

For those with backyard bird feeders, Squirrels are not viewed as one of Mother Nature's endearing species. They are bushy tailed rats who thieves. To no avail, copious thought & money has been applied to finding the ultimate "squirrel-proof" feeder. From the Squirrel's perspective, they are simply opportunistically making evolutionary adaptations to co-exist with and take advantage of life with Humans.

While the individual above appeared to be entertaining me as I walked under this limb, he actually was attempting to hide in defense. He's probably not a survivor with a long life.

The couple below were enjoying a drink & possibly Pokeweed berries.

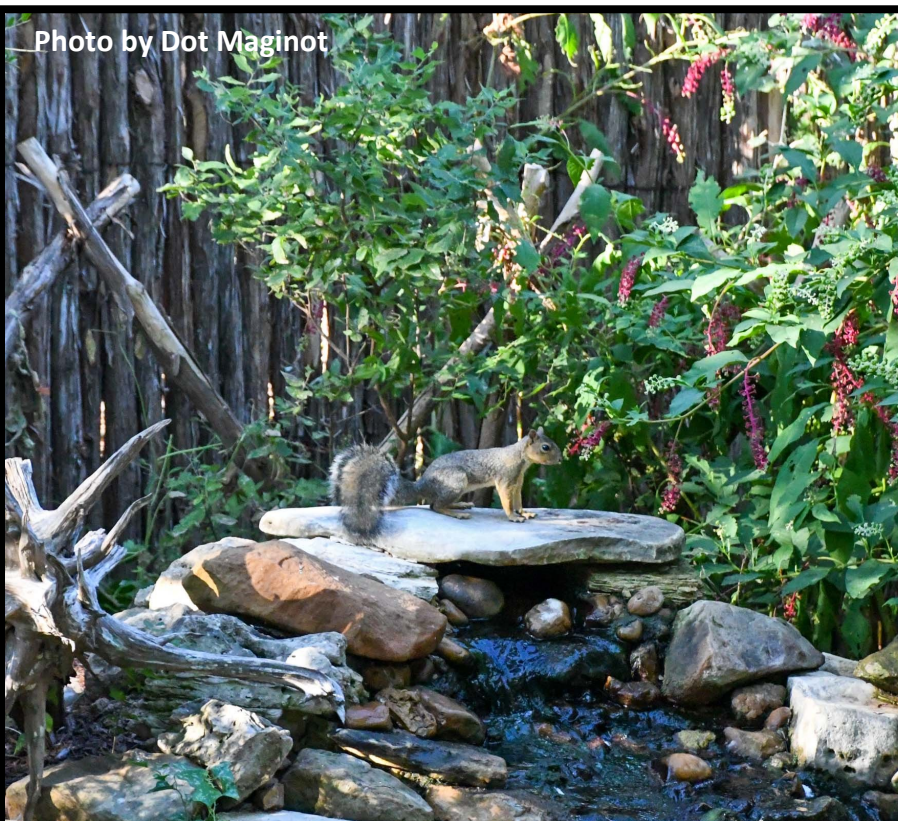


Photo by Dot Maginot

Some Squirrelly Facts:

- Fox Squirrels are our most prevalent species in the Hill Country followed by Rock Squirrels (the black headed species).
- Gray & Flying Squirrels are found in East Texas.
- Squirrels are diurnal, mostly herbivores, & mostly solitary.
- They produce 2 litters annually in leaf nests or cavities.



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

Henry David Thoreau

What's Flutterin' & Crawlين' at the Pollinator Garten?



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Paper Wasp on Prairie Goldenrod Solidago nemoralis

*Prairie Goldenrod is currently in spectacular bloom in the garden & completely abuzz with native bees orgiastically feeding on the pollen. The wasp in the photo belongs to the **Paper Wasp** family.*

Blue-winged Wasp

Scolia dubia

The Blue-winged Wasps are considered to be the friend of gardeners since they protect their flowers from the destructive insects, Japanese Beetles.



Photo by Lonnie Childs



Photo by Dot Maginot

Gulf Fritillary Butterfly (*Agraulis vanillae*) on Texas Greeneyes (*Berlandiera texana*)

This beautiful Butterfly uses multiple Passion-flower species as its host plant.



"Birds are indicators of the environment. If they are in trouble, we know we'll soon be in trouble."

Roger Tory Peterson

Avian Friends at FNC

Northern Mockingbird

Mimus polyglottos

For the last couple of years, a Mockingbird has staked out the Pokeweed berries in the Bird Blind as their own personal buffet.



Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

Osprey regularly overwinter here & enjoy fishing in Live Oak Lake. Look for a hawk size bird hovering over the water, searching for a fish.

Canada Geese

Branta canadensis

This gaggle can be found feeding at the Ernst Farm in the morning & returning to the lake before noon. We have some local gaggles who stay year-round, probably domesticated groups who never learned to migrate north.



All photos by Dot Maginot



“The Hummingbird is the spirit of pure joy! She is the messenger of beauty and wonder, and she reminds us to taste the sweet nectar of life.”
Anonymous

Feature Story: Humming All the Way to Panama **by Lonnie Childs**

This female Ruby-throated Hummingbird was photographed on September 19th confidently staring into the distance, perhaps envisioning the second half of her almost 3,000 mile journey to Central America, on which she was about to embark. In the spring, she had migrated to the eastern US, perhaps as far north as Canada to spend the summer and breed. Now, she is passing through on her way to her winter home, stopping off at FNC to gorge and build up fat deposits by 25-40% (some estimates are that they double in weight) for the demanding flight, part of which will cross the Gulf of Mexico. She does it all alone.

Ruby-throats inhabit the largest geographic area of any US hummers, which all lies east of the Great Plains where they are also the only breeding hummer in permanent residence. Fortunately, they are one of the few birds whose population has increased steadily over the last 50 years, probably aided by the increasing popularity of backyard feeders.

They are taxonomically classified in the *Apodiformes* order which means “without feet”, because they appear to have none. Their tiny feet cannot hop or walk but only shuffle along a branch. In a fluke of anatomy, they can scratch their head and neck by raising their foot up and over their wing. Important stuff—imagine if you couldn’t scratch that itch!

The breeding cycle begins when the male engages in a mating flight configured in a u-shaped pendulum flying back and forth until the female succumbs. She instinctually realizes that he will provide no assistance and is simply going to fly off into the sunset and forget about her after mating

The female spends 6-10 days building a cup-like nest about 2 in. broad and 1 in. deep, carefully lined and camouflaged with lichens like little works of art. They locate the nests on top of the branches of deciduous trees about 15-20 feet in the air. Ruby-throats can have 1-2 broods a year of 1-3 eggs. The incubation period of the eggs lasts 12-14 days with the whole nesting cycle covers 18-22 days.



Photo by Dot Maginot



"Adopt the pace of nature; her secret is patience."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Feature Story: Humming All the Way to Panama (continued)

While most of us only observe hummers at nectar feeders, surviving only on sugar water or nectar will not suffice. Up to 60% of their nutrition derives from insects which they pluck from the air, branches, or out of spider webs. As to nectar sources, their greatest attraction is to orange or red tubular flowers, although they are known to ingest sugar from other sources like tree sap. Hummers must daily consume food equal to 50% of their body weight to remain healthy. Although it does not seem to be well understood why hummers need a balance of insects and nectar, experiments have shown that they require both for survival. Maybe that nectar just serves as a short-term energy fix, kind of like a donut at mid-morning?

Although there are differing opinions as to what triggers the start of fall migration, it is generally thought that hummingbirds experience hormonal changes in response to changes in daylight duration. Perhaps declining numbers of flowers, nectar and insects along with their internal biological calendar and cooling weather contributes to the triggering event which generally occurs in August to early September.

The journey south is thought to occur along the same pathways that the individual previously took, although juveniles somehow find their way in their inaugural flight. Hummers fly during the day low over treetops which enables them to spot food sources along the way. The most difficult link in the migration is the 18-24 hour non-stop flight across the Gulf of Mexico during the night, which begs the question, how do they navigate.

Our fearless friend will unflinchingly make the journey for multiple years to further the cause of the species, ensuring its survival. Hummingbirds represent Mother Nature in its finest form and function. We always enjoy their beauty and entertainment, but they deserve our respect too. Vaya con Dios Ruby-throat.

Sources: Cornell Labs www.allaboutbirds.org
Www.hummingbirdcentral.com

Hummer Facts:

- Black-chinned Hummers are our prevalent summer resident in the Hill Country.
- Texas hosts 18 species & the US hosts 27 species.
- Hummers only live in the Western Hemisphere & include 360 species.
- Their wingbeats average 53 per second or 3,180 per minute.
- Their normal flight speed is 25-30 mph & increases to 60 mph in escape.
- Their heart-rate averages 250 bpm at rest & up to 1200 bpm when feeding.

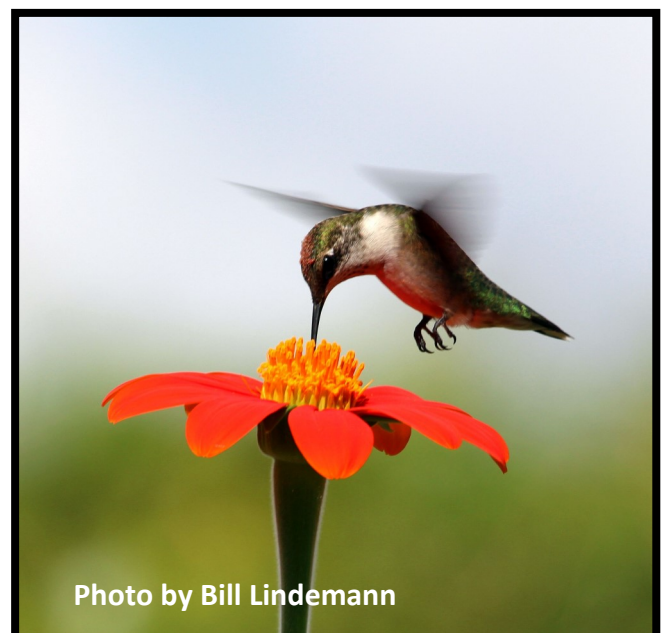


Photo by Bill Lindemann



"Nature has been for me, for as long as I remember, a source of solace, inspiration, adventure, and delight; a home, a teacher, a companion."
Lorraine Anderson

Goldenrod Festoons Live Oak Lake

Tall Goldenrod

Solidago altissima

Covering the island in Live Oak Lake & hanging from the cliff face at the Fern Grotto. Native Bees love it!



Congratulations to the Fredericksburg Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) for being recognized as the 2021 Chapter of the Year at their recent state symposium!

Bird Feeder Tip of the Month



When do I take down my Hummingbird feeders?

Taking feeders down to force them to leave, will bring Hummers great hardship as they need to gain body fat for their migration travels.

Leave your feeders up until 2 – 3 weeks have passed without seeing any birds feeding from them or until freezing weather sets in.



"If you truly love nature, you will find beauty everywhere."

Laura Ingalls Wilde



Basket-flower
Centaurea americana

Please consider continuing to support FFNC.

Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center Board of Directors

Lonnie Childs—President Sharon Rodriguez—Secretary Carl Luckenbach - Treasurer
Paul Person—Vice-president Billy Guin Tom Hynes
Jane Crone Gracie Waggener

**Thanks to our supporters and the City of Fredericksburg
for your continued support of the
Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center!**

A 501(c)(3) corporation

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

**Comments, questions, or future newsletter submissions can be sent to
Lonnie Childs, Newsletter Editor, at lonniechilds@utexas.edu**