

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

May, 2022 Volume 3 Number 4

<http://fredericksburgNaturecenter.com>

Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

We had a few brief spatters of rain at the park this past month and then a fast forward to July temperatures. I went for a hike after a rain and was heartened by a small outburst of spring blooms, but by the following Saturday, many of the hopeful flowers were already curling in retreat from the heat

We enjoyed a fruitful past month in terms of outreach and education. Our first program in over two years featured Hill Country storyteller, Lee Haile, and was a successful re-boot for us. Next we were thrilled to host the Hill Country Master Naturalist class of 2022 for a presentation and tour of our micro-habitats. In early May, we kicked-off a regular series of guided tours of FNC with the next open tour planned for Saturday, June 4th (see details on page 2).

As part of our strategic plan, we have initiated the development of a structured conservation plan through a contract with Environmental Survey Consulting of Austin. We are excited to get some professional advice on how to improve our habitats and increase biodiversity at FNC. Their recommendations will also include ideas about how to improve our trail system for safety and accessibility.

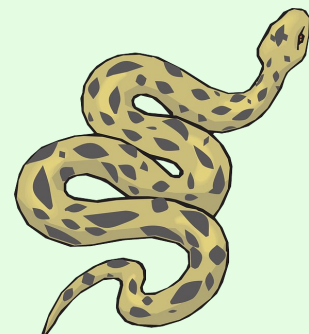
As part of gathering ideas for a future Interpretive Center at the park, the Board has begun to conduct visits to similar nature centers in the area. Look for more news on that effort in the near future.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

In this issue:

- **FFNC Activities—Guided Tour**
- **Master Naturalists Visit FNC**
- **Observations Along the Trail**
 - **Wildflowers**
 - **Insects**
 - **Mimosas**
 - **Crawling Fauna**
- **Feature Story: Creating a Home Grown National Park**





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"

FFNC Activities

June 4th, Saturday

Guided Tour of FNC Trails

Time: 9:00-10:30am

Length: Approximately 1 mile

Tour Theme: **"The Seven Micro-habitats of FNC"** which will be previewed along the trails and include a stop at the Butterfly Habitat and Bird Blind. We will also discuss plants and animals that we may encounter along the trail.

Tour Leader: Lonnie Childs, President of FFNC

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate There are a few difficult, but short sections.

Things to Wear & Bring: Wear good hiking shoes, comfortable clothing, & a hat. Bring a bottle of water & a hiking stick if needed.

Location: Meet at the entrance kiosk at the FNC parking lot across from the LBJ Municipal Park office.



Photo by Lonnie Childs

To Register: Send an email to info@fredericksburgnaturecenter.com



Tuesday Fundays at FNC are always on! We gather every **Tuesday at 8:30am** at 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.



“Like music and art, love of nature is a common language that can transcend political or social boundaries.”

Jimmy Carter

2022 Master Naturalist Class Tours FNC



Almost 30 students of the **Hill Country Master Naturalist Class (HCMN) of 2022** toured FNC on April 12th. As part of their curriculum, they were first treated to a presentation on “The Seven Micro-habitats of FNC” and then enjoyed a guided tour of the hiking trails with a visit to each of the micro-habitats. FFNC has benefited from the volunteerism of HC Master Naturalists for 18 years and values our continuing partnership. **Thanks to Patti Guin and Gracie Waggener for organizing the visit.**



Photos by Dot Maginot

Nature's News of the Weird

How to stop deer from colliding with cars? Bring in wolves!

Right Click [here](#) & Open Link



"One person's weed is another person's wildflower."

Susan Wittig Albert

Observations Along the Trail—Wildflowers!

We continue to experience March winds while receiving little of the anticipated April showers while remaining in an official state of Exceptional drought. The Spring wildflower show has suffered, but in years like this you just have to stop, bend over a bit, and you will find that the smaller floral species can be just as beautiful. We also found a couple of non-venomous snakes and one gorgeous moth caterpillar along the trail. Here are some shots of Mother Nature in all her wonder.



Winecup emerging
Callirhoe involucrata



Mealy Blue Sage
Salvia farinacea

Photos by
Lonnie Childs



Southern Dewberries
Rubus trivialis



Snake Herb
Dyschoriste linearis



Navajo Tea
Thelesperma subnudum

"Insects are the little things that run the world."

Edward O. Wilson

Observations Along the Trail—Insects Feasting



**Metallic Boring Beetle (*Acmaeodera* sp.) on
Calylophus (*Oenothera berlandiera*)**



Photos by
Lonnie Childs

**More *Acmaeodera* beetles sharing a Skeleton Plant
flower with a Texas Flower Scarab beetle
(*Trichiotinus texanus*). John, Paul, George, & Ringo
pollinating to the tune of the same flower.**



**Plains Prickly Pear (*Opuntia macrorhiza*)
A low, sprawling species.**



**Native bees enjoy an Engelmann's Prickly pear
Our common *Opuntia* species (*O. engelmannii*).**

Observations Along the Trail—Our Native Mimosas



Roemer's Sensitive Briar
Mimosa roemeriana



Photos by Lonnie Childs



Fragrant Mimosa
Mimosa borealis

Photo by Dot Maginot

If you grew up in a Houston or southern US suburb, you likely would have had a "Mimosa" or Persian Silk Tree. Native to Asia, the tree is not a true Mimosa and is considered invasive in Florida. Texas has 15 true members of the Mimosa genus with 4 reported to occur in Gillespie County. FNC hosts two of the most common:

- 1) **Roemer's Sensitive Briar** is a sprawling vine up to 6' long that displays gorgeous puffball flowers that are pinkish-purple when mature. It's "sensitive" designation results from its display of "nyctinastic" behavior that involves curling up for protection when touched by a predator or your hand. It's a fun trick sure to tickle your child or grandchild. There is a thick stand in the sandy soil along the trail just below the dam.
- 2) **Fragrant Mimosa** is a thorny shrub to 6' tall that grows on rocky or caliche slopes exhibiting the typical white to pinkish blossoms but with fragrance. At FNC, it inhabits the arid, rocky bluff above the creek. It goes unnoticed until it bursts out in pink puffball magic. Fragrant Mimosa is an extremely tough and drought tolerant plant, but even the deer will tell you that it's prickly and will reach out to grab you.



"When the snake decided to go straight, he didn't get anywhere."

William Stafford

Observations Along the Trail— Legless, Crawling Fauna



Photo by Dot Maginot

Rough Green Snake *Opheodrys aestivus*
This individual was found in the Live Oak forest climbing a tree in what is normal habitat—moist meadows and woodlands, often near water. It is typically arboreal, frequently found climbing in low vegetation where its green coloring provides camouflage, and is also a good swimmer. They are non-venomous and tolerant of human approach. Its diet consists of mostly insects and arthropods with an occasional snail or tree frog for variety. Rough Green Snakes inhabit the southeastern US with its western limit ranging to central Texas.

Blotched or Plain-bellied Water Snake

Nerodia erythrogaster transversa

This "red phase" juvenile was found lounging on the bridge. It is often mistaken without merit for the venomous Cottonmouth, mostly because they both live in water. It can grow to 36".



Photo by Lonnie Childs



Photo by Lonnie Childs



Buck Moth larva

Hemileuca maia

BEWARE!

Their larvae are covered in hollow spines that are attached to a poison sac. The poison can cause symptoms ranging from stinging, itching and burning sensations to nausea



"National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst."
Wallace Stegner

Feature Story: Creating a Home Grown National Park

by Lonnie Childs

The following information is excerpted from two books and a presentation by Doug Tallamy:

Bringing Nature Home—How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants (Timber Press, 2007)

Nature's Best Hope—A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard (Timber Press, 2019)

"Home Grown National Park—Networking Naturally" - video presentation <https://youtu.be/slUA2RoagVI>

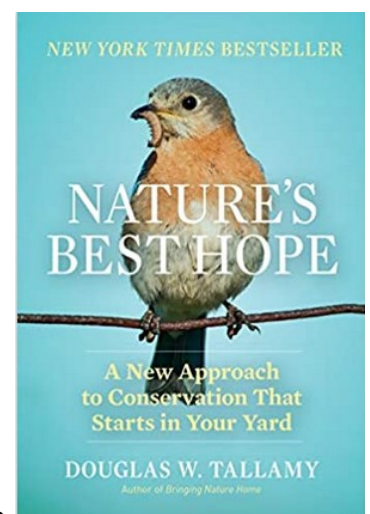
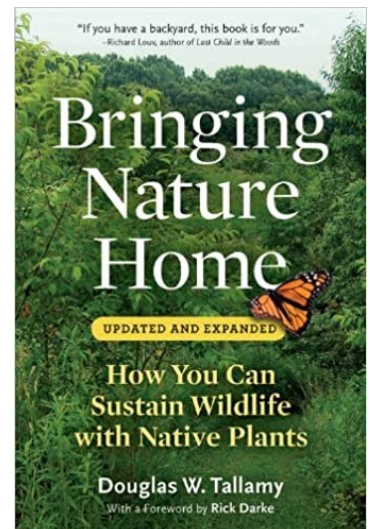
<https://homegrownnationalpark.org>—website

In last month's newsletter, I wrote about the priceless value of well-functioning natural habitats and of using the concept of ecosystem services to better assess how natural habitats contribute to human life. At FNC, our mission is to preserve and enhance the existing seven micro-habitats and highlight them as a way to educate our visitors about habitats. We have also created some man-made habitats that mimic nature at the Bird Blind, Butterfly Habitat, and Pollinator Garden which serve to not only attract bird and pollinator species for viewing, but also provide examples of how people can create habitat.

In addition to sounding the alarm about climate change, scientists are also warning about the drastic loss of biodiversity around the globe, much of it driven by habitat loss. Biodiversity is a term coined in the 1970's that simply means "the variety of life in the world or in a particular habitat or ecosystem." In his award winning books, entomologist Doug Tallamy cries out more specifically that we need to pay attention to the decline of insects, which are the primary pollinating species on earth. Equally important, insects are one step up the food chain from plants which convert energy from the sun into carbohydrates. Indeed, the lowly caterpillar transfers more energy from plants than any other planteaters.

Amidst all this gloom and doom, what are we citizens to do? Most of us are not professional conservationists managing large tracts of land. But Tallamy posits, there is not enough pristine land left to preserve at this point, half of earth's surface is already used for agricultural purposes, and humans live on much of the other half. Furthermore, 78% of US land is privately owned. The secret to righting the course on habitat destruction and pollinator loss lies in conservation on private land, and conservationists working on land where people live, not just on pristine lands where we don't. We must find ways to allow nature to thrive in human dominated landscapes.

Which brings us back to what can we common citizens do? We can create well functioning habitats in our own small plots of land, even if we only have a small backyard. Conservation works on any size property. More specifically, lawns are the low hanging fruit. Tallamy tells us that there are 20 million acres of national parks and 40 million acres of backyards in the US. If we could restore half of those





“There can be no purpose more inspiring than to begin the age of restoration, renewing the wonderful diversity of life that still surrounds us.”
Edward O. Wilson

Feature Story: Creating a Home Grown National Park (continued)

backyards to functioning habitats, we would have our own **Home Grown National Park (HGP)**. Although Tallamy is clear in arguing that restoring backyards does not constitute enough acreage to reverse biodiversity loss, it is a beginning that can be initiated by ordinary small land and homeowners.

What are the key objectives of HGP? Tallamy posits that we should start by pursuing the following key goals:

- 1) **Reduce the area of lawns.** They represent sterile habitats that support few other species.
- 2) **Plant more native plants.** Not all plants are equal and can be divided into three categories—1) Contributors enhance ecosystems; 2) Non-contributors consume resources but add no value; 3) Detractors damage ecosystems.

Insects have evolved with specific plants on which they will lay eggs and their larvae will feed. There are “keystone” species that support most of the caterpillar species—14% of native plants provide food for 90% of caterpillars. The absence of those plants means the breakdown of their lifecycle.

- 3) **Remove invasive plants (i.e. detractors).** Invasive plants have been defined as *“alien species (not native to that ecosystem) whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.”* Note that not all alien species that we import to our landscapes are considered invasive, but some can be quite impactful (ex. KR Bluestem, Bastard Cabbage Kudzu Chinese Tallow....)

In pursuing these objectives, our endgame should be to create an ecological landscape. **What are the responsibilities of an ecological landscape?**

1. **Supports the food web by providing native plants.**
2. **Sequesters carbon.** Lawns are inefficient at this.
3. **Cleans and manages water.** Even in a small backyard, good landscapes hold water and prevent runoff.
4. **Support pollinators.**



Why should we become part of the HGP movement? The first reason might be the most compelling. It is simply the right action to take given our environmental challenges and the human contribution to those problems. We are constantly bombarded with depressing environmental news that ratchets up the imperative to do something. The HGP movement provides a common sense course of action for the average person to pursue and satisfy your desire to act and contribute to the solution. **We must transform from an adversarial relationship to a collaborative relationship with Mother Nature.**

Another compelling motivation might be our desire to **create beauty and host a little bit of nature** in our own backyard. Native plant habitats can be just as attractive as non-native ones and will be a much greater magnet for birds, butterflies, and pollinators whose presence we all enjoy.

Finally, native habitats will generally require **less resource inputs** (no fertilizers or pesticides!) and **less maintenance** than non-native landscapes. We can all appreciate less work and less expense.



"The caterpillar does all the work, but the butterfly gets all the publicity."

George Carlin

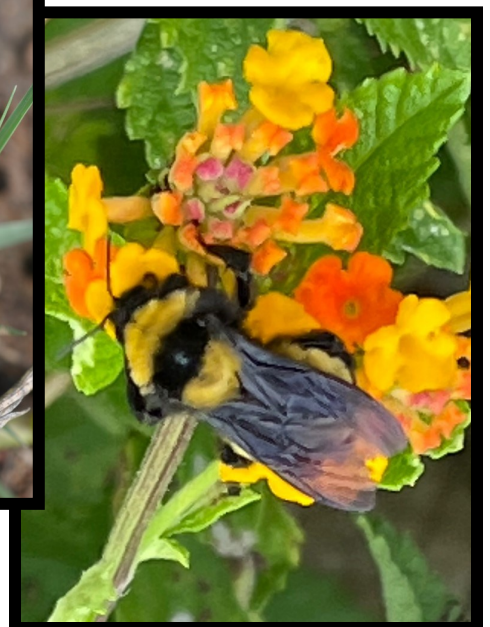
Feature Story: Creating a Home Grown National Park (continued)

If you want to get started on your journey towards your own HGP, I would recommend starting by watching the video notated at the beginning of this article along with checking out the HGP website. Both of Doug Tallamy's books are great, but if you want to choose one, I might recommend the newer one. *Nature's Best Hope*, since it offers his latest ideas and is more solution oriented. By the end of the book, you will hopefully have internalized the message that we could still be nature's best hope.

Other resources:

- ◆ **Texas Wildscapes: Gardening for Wildlife** by Kelly Conrad Bender
- ◆ **Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.** website information on wildscaping
https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/wildscapes/
- ◆ **Nature Plant Society of Texas /Fredericksburg Chapter**— npsot.org/Fredericksburg
 - ◆ Plant Lists
 - ◆ Native Landscape Certification Program (NLCP) - series of four classes that teach how to design, build, and maintain a native landscape
 - ◆ Pollinator Garden Assistance and Recognition Program (PGARP) - guides will help you assess and make recommendations on how to improve your garden for pollinators
- ◆ **National Wildlife Federation (NWF)** - Garden for Wildlife program <https://www.nwf.org>
- ◆ **Audubon Society**—Plants for Birds <https://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds>

**Would you like to host
these pollinators?**

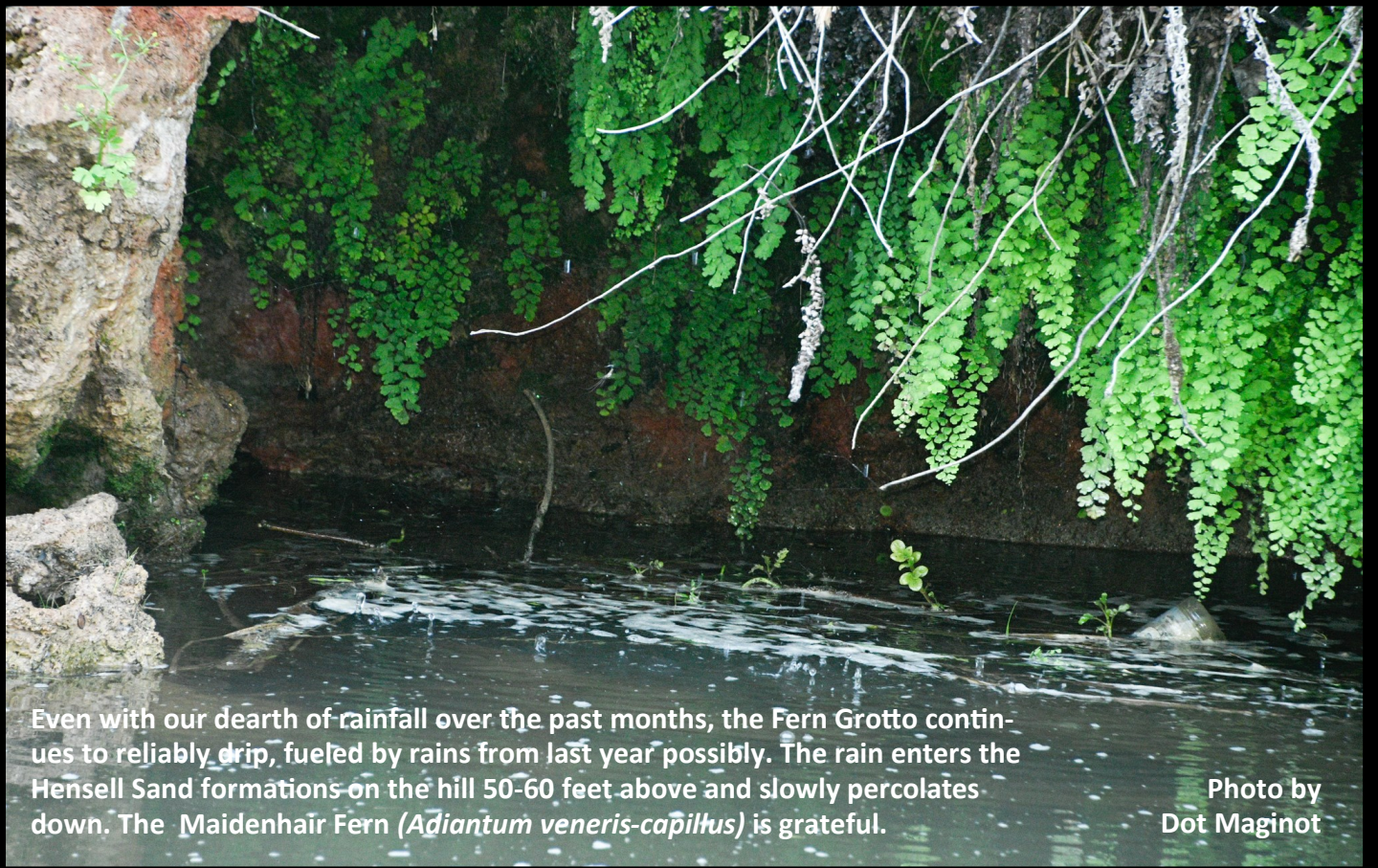


**Photos by
Lonnie Childs**

"Water is the driving force of all nature."

Leonardo da Vinci

The Drip Goes On



Even with our dearth of rainfall over the past months, the Fern Grotto continues to reliably drip, fueled by rains from last year possibly. The rain enters the Hensell Sand formations on the hill 50-60 feet above and slowly percolates down. The Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum veneris-capillus*) is grateful.

Photo by
Dot Maginot

Bird Lover Tip of the Month

What should you do if you find a baby bird?

As spring progresses to summer, depending on the species of bird, eggs have been laid, chicks have hatched, or fledglings are developing. Of course, that also means unfortunately that baby birds will tumble out of nests to the ground to be discovered if they lucky by an attentive human.

Click on this link for a decision chart on what to do if you find a baby bird. There is also information on how to care for a baby bird if that proves to be the only available option.

<https://www.avianhaven.org/foundbabybirdflowchart.pdf>

Source: *From Healers of the Wild: People Who Care for Injured and Orphaned Wildlife*
By Shannon K. Jacobs



"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. ... There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature — the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter."

Rachel Carson



Photo by Lonnie Childs

**Many thanks to the
Wildflower Center
and
Native American Seed
for awarding FFNC a
Seed Grant
that allowed for
re-seeding our
Butterfly Meadow.**

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