

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

June, 2022 Volume 3 Number 6

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

We started June on a somber note as our beloved Board member, Sharon Rodriguez, passed away. She was a volunteer par excellence and even more importantly, a simply wonderful person. Read more about her on pages 2 and 3. The family is planning on holding a memorial service at the park in the near future, and we will pass along details when they develop.

Continuing drought and July temperatures seem to be the norm for now. I have danced my best dance underneath a dark cloud to no avail, so perhaps it is time to transition to just resolving to live with it for now. Wishing for rain could be like carrying an umbrella, the wrong strategy if you really want it to rain. Quit wishing, and you will not be disappointed. Excuse me. It must be the heat that's stimulating all this despairing advice.

We want to welcome Tomm Musselman, long-time city leader, as our newest Board member. He has volunteered his time and labor over the past year, and his local wisdom and knowledge will be valuable additions.

We are in the process of forming an Interpretive Center Advisory Committee to guide us on our journey. Board members have also begun to visit area nature centers to learn about their facilities and educational offerings as a way to inform us as we develop a concept statement about the scope of our planned Interpretive Center and what services and outcomes it might provide.

Even in this heat, early morning hikes on the trail are still enjoyable. As you cross the bridge over Live Oak Creek, stop and listen to the rustling Sycamore leaves and feel the cool water. It offers a refreshing moment to counter these dog days of summer.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

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"When someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure."

Author unknown

In Memoriam—Sharon Rodriquez (1946-2022)

Our beloved Board member, Sharon Rodriquez, passed away on June 4th. Sharon was a kind, generous, and wonderful lady who was a valued contributor at FNC for 15 years. She selflessly pitched in to help with many activities over the years and recently had served as Board Secretary and led the effort to bring the Hummingbird Garden back to life. Without complaint, she made the hike back to the garden countless times to water and maintain it. We will sorely miss her, not just as a contributor, but as a friend and colleague. The world could use more Sharons.

Following is the "Volunteer Spotlight" about Sharon published in the October, 2020 newsletter.

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—one in Houston and one 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





"In mythology throughout the world, the butterfly represents the soul and its journey in this life and the next." Tom Frost

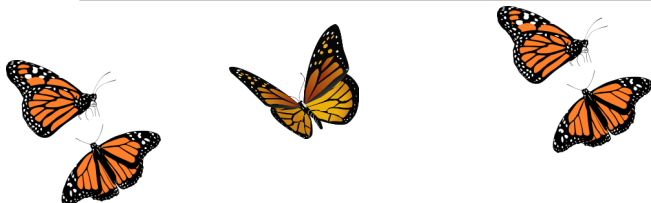
In Memoriam—Sharon Rodriquez

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.



The Rodriquez family recently visited with members of the FFNC Board and volunteer corps at the Pollinator Garden. They also took a hike to view the Hummingbird Garden tended by Sharon with dedication and care at FNC. From left to right are **Eli Rodriquez, husband; Tycho Rodriquez, grandson; Mary Novotny-Rodriquez, daughter-in-law; and Andy Rodriquez, son.**

In recognition of Sharon's love for nature, Gracie Waggener and Cathy Downs staged the release of Monarch butterflies at the Pollinator Garden. Each family member released butterflies who soared off on their journey north. At right, **Tico Rodriquez**, Sharon's grandson, was fortunate to host a butterfly on his hand who lingered awhile for his enjoyment.



Photos by Lonnie Childs



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

Gracie Waggener and team did some extensive re-planting in the Pollinator Garden this year. Lantana and others had taken more than their share of growing territory and were cut back to allow for planting more and smaller wildflower species. Although we have always contended with deer, they were less apt to munch on the larger woody perennials like Lantana, and it used to rain in past years. In these hard times, the deer have found our new tender plantings to be a delicious smorgasboard. So we are taking protective measures, starting with entry gates with picket sides and a new entrance arbor from the RV park. We will start there, and proceed as the deer dictate.



Trudy Eberhardt, Gracie Waggener, and Laura Grant

Some of the Pollinator Garden team work on the constant task of weeding.

Tom Musselman, Frank Garcia, Tom Hynes, and Lonnie Childs work on installing the new garden gates and posts for the entrance arbor. A big thanks to **Bob Waggener** for building the sturdy and handsome gates.



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.



Volunteer Spotlight



Deb Bradford

Deb Bradford has become one of our most dependable and valued volunteers helping wherever needed. We appreciate her support! Here is her story in her own words. Editor's note

I grew up in Muenster, Texas--a German community of about 1400 knot-headed Germans up in North Texas, close to the Red River. Muenster was founded in 1889 and is a very tight-knit community--mostly Catholic, mostly German descent, with a strong work ethic with emphasis on self-reliance. These were qualities that were evident in Fredericksburg, and attracted me to the community.

I graduated from Grayson County College in Sherman with a degree in Nursing and specialized in Surgery. After a 48- year career in the Operating Room, I retired in 2019, thankfully before the start of Covid.

I married Stuart in 1977, and most of our married life has been in Austin, with a brief 5 yr stint in Grapevine, Tx. We have three grown children and three grandboys. Our two sons and their wives live in Austin, and our daughter and her family live in San Antonio. The grandsons keep us hopping, and we are trekking to San Antonio almost every weekend for their sports events.

We lived in Austin for over forty years and watched in sadness as the mindset and the culture of the town began to change dramatically. We had friends in Fredericksburg, and visiting them convinced us we should make a move here. In 2014, we purchased a small house and began working on it and living in Fred on the weekends. In 2020, we took the big step and moved permanently to Fredericksburg.

We are big hikers and love to discover new parks and trails. We have been to Enchanted Rock many times, along with Pedernales and Llano State Parks. We realized the hiking was a bit more limited around the Fredericksburg area. We live right under Cross Mountain and do our walk/hike there a couple of times a week and love it. We discovered the Ft. Martin Scott trail, but our favorite here is the Lady Bird park and the two trails it offers. We enjoy the different habitats it offers, and the bird blind is always a special treat. The whole park is special, and the pollinator garden and the Hummingbird garden are just delights. I decided I really wanted to be a part of an organization that put such a place together. It was obvious the people in this organization were devoted to the native Texas environment.

I have been a volunteer with FFNC about 1 1/2 years. A lot of my time was spent in the pollinator garden, where weeding is a never-ending task. I have learned so much about native plants from just listening to Gracie, Patty, Jane, Laura, and all the naturalists working there. I am now helping Jane in the bird blind, which is a very special task to me, and is my favorite area. I am also helping with the watering.



Observations Along the Trail—Wildflowers



Photo by Dot Maginot

Engelmann's or Cut-leaf Daisy

Engelmannia peristenia

This hardy perennial is a consistent bloomer but has even struggled to bloom this drought stricken year.



Photo by Dot Maginot

Narrow-leaf Bluets or Baby's Breath

Stenaria nigricans

American Water-willow *Justicia americana*

This wetlands species colonizes in shallow water or mud spreading via underground stems.



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Mexican Hat

Ratibida columnifera

This hardy perennial can be an aggressive spreader.



Photo by Dot Maginot



"Turtles can tell you more about the path than a lizard."

Anonymous

Observations Along the Trail



Texas Spotted Whiptail

Cnemidophorus* or *Aspidoscelis gularis

This is our common lizard that you will see scurrying away typically on the red Hensell Sands. There are about 46 distinct whiptail species, most with the standard stripe pattern, so that's why this one is not called the "striped whiptail." In the photo, you can see the row of spots that suggest its name. This high metabolism species grows to 11" in length and is prone to short bursts of speed, always on the hunt for termites, grasshoppers, and caterpillars. In the cool winter months, it "brumates" - a state of sluggishness, inactivity, or torpor undergone by ectothermic "cold-blooded" animals. Only warm-blooded animals hibernate.

Photos by Dot Maginot

Red-eared Slider

Trachemys scripta

Our common pond turtle is native to southeastern and central United States and northern Mexico including Texas. Unfortunately, this popular pet species has been widely exported to the western US, Asia, and Europe, where it was released into the wild & proved to be invasive in outcompeting turtle species native to those locales. They are valuable ecosystem contributors but only in their native habitat! They are known carriers of Salmonella.



"I think I like wildflowers best. They just grow wherever they want. No one has to plant them. And then their seeds blow in the wind and they find a new place to grow." Rebecca Donovan

Blumen and Buzzin' at the Garten

Pink Evening Primrose *Oenothera speciosa*

In their northern range, they open in the evening per their name. In their southern range, they open in the morning.

**American Basketflower & Native Bee
*Centaurea americana***



**Sonoran Bumblebee *Bombus sonorus*
on
Mealy Blue Sage *Salvia farinacea***



Blumen and Buzzin' at the Garten



Photo by Dot Maginot

Widow's Tears or Dayflower

Commelina erecta

Colonies of Dayflower are lovely in a natural meadow, but it can become an aggressive weedy pest in a maintained garden.



Photo by Dot Maginot

Butterfly Milkweed *Asclepias tuberosa*

This ubiquitous species inhabits most of the US and southern Canada. It serves as a nectar source and larval host plant for Grey Hairstreak, Monarch, and Queen butterflies. Native Americans chewed the root to cure pleurisy giving it the name of Pleurisy Root.



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Antelope Horns seedpod *Asclepias Asperula*

The seedpod is filled with seeds attached to feather-like structures serving as wings to carry them on the wind to new homes.



“Imagine going to sleep as a caterpillar and waking up as a butterfly. What a rush!

Meta Modee

Blumen and Buzzin’ at the Garten



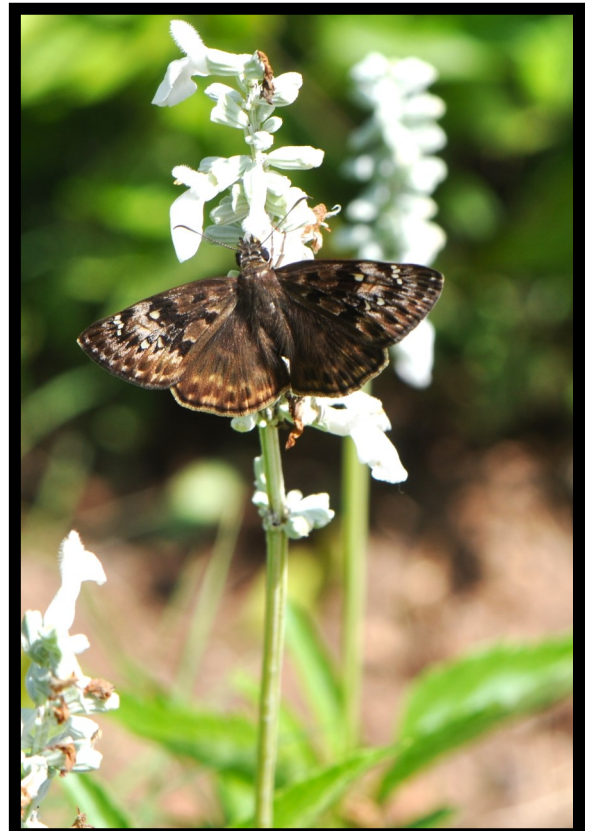
Photos by Lonnie Childs

**Large Milkweed Bug *Oncopeltus fasciatus* on
Tropical Milkweed *Asclepias curassavica***

The bug feeds on the seeds of milkweed which convey their toxicity to the bug. Its’ bright coloration warns potential predators, “Don’t eat me, I taste bad and am toxic.”

**Horace’s Duskywing *Erynnis horatius*
on white Mealy Blue Sage *Salvia farinacea***

Its host plants are Oaks including Post Oak (*Quercus stellata*) and Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*).



Call me creepy now,
but I’m going to be a
Queen someday.





"The environment is where we all meet, where we all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share. It is not only a mirror of ourselves, but a focusing lens on what we can become."
Lady Bird Johnson

Feature Story: Milkweeds—Ambrosia to the Monarchs

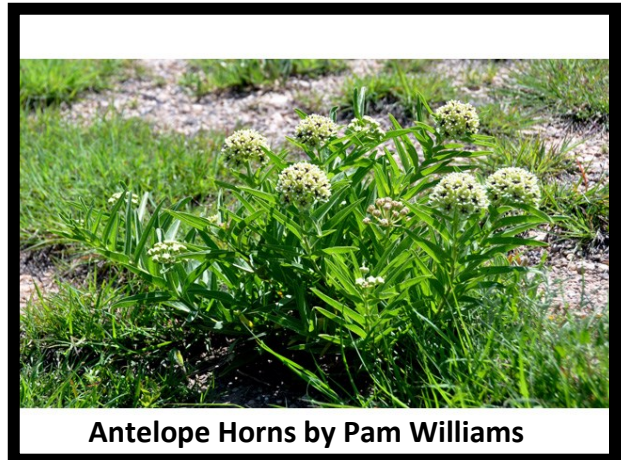
By Lonnie Childs

With the ascendance of **Monarch** butterflies as a rock star species, recognition has also come to the Milkweed family for its importance to the butterfly species as a larval host plant and also for their sheer beauty. While Monarchs may visit an array of different flowers for nectar, they have evolved to only lay their eggs on Milkweeds where they will hatch into caterpillar larvae and feed on that host. The evolutionary message is clear—no Milkweeds, no Monarchs.

Many of you have perhaps followed the news on declining Monarch populations overwintering in Mexico and California. Scientists postulate that reductions in Milkweed populations across the Monarch's spring and summer breeding areas in the United States are a significant factor contributing to the butterfly's decline. Intensified agricultural practices, increasing development of rural lands, and the use of mowing and herbicides to control roadside vegetation have all contributed to the decrease of Milkweeds. What can you do to help? Plant and preserve Milkweeds in your landscape. More on that later.

Milkweeds are classified in the *Asclepidaceae* sub-family (named after Asclepius, Greek god of healing) and are made up of 2900 species in the tropical to subtropical geographies of South America and Africa. Texas hosts about 58 Milkweed species in 6 genera with *Asclepias* and *Matelea* encompassing the most species. Milkweeds get their name from the latex sap that is exuded when tissue is damaged. The latex contains cardiac glycosides which are organic compounds that can be beneficial in treating certain heart conditions, but in this case are toxic to humans and may even cause skin irritation if touched. Monarch caterpillars consume this latex which in turn provides their toxicity to ward off potential predators, thus serving as an effective defense mechanism.

Milkweeds generate some of the most complex flowers in the plant kingdom. Their pollination process is also quite unique in that their pollen is not released in individual grains, but rather pollen grains are grouped in pollen sacs which attach in pairs to the legs of pollinating insects. Larger insects such as bees and wasps are the most effective Milkweed pollinators as smaller insects may be weighted down by the pollen sacs and not be able to achieve lift-off, thus dying on the flower or vine so to speak. Ironically, Monarch butterflies, in fact most butterflies, are not effective pollinators. Milkweeds are generally a good nectar source for all insects.



Antelope Horns by Pam Williams



Antelope Horns flower by Lonnie Childs



"Deep in their roots, all flowers keep the light."

Theodore Roethke

Feature Story: Milkweeds—Ambrosia to the Monarchs

Gillespie County harbors about 11 species of Milkweeds. Let's talk about some of the resident Milkweeds including those that we host in the park along with a few species that we grow in the gardens.

Antelope Horns (*Asclepias Asperula*) is one of the most widespread Texas species and most prevalent in our area. Due to its unique clumping, sprawling form, it is easily recognizable along our roadsides. Unfortunately, the recent drought has severely limited the emergence of this perennial this spring, at least in eastern Gillespie County. Its vernacular name derives from the shape of their curved seedpods. Although the uninitiated might at first be turned off by their unconventional appearance, I find the rounded flower heads to be bizarrely beautiful.

This is one of the most bountiful of our local Milkweeds when the Monarch migration moves through in the spring, so please preserve them on your landscape if you have them present. When the seedpods dry, you can break them open and easily help disseminate the feathery airborne seeds around your property. Look for Monarch eggs on the undersides of leaves, or better yet, maybe you can find a Monarch larva to show to your neighbors and children or grand-children.



Texas or White Milkweed (*Asclepias texana*) is a perennial growing to 3 feet tall in ditches, ravines, and along streams in sandy, gravelly soil. It is endemic to central Texas with another disjunct population in west Texas. Texas Milkweed sports lovely white flower clusters in which stalks of nearly equal length spring from a common center and form a flat to rounded top. You can sometimes find this species in the nursery trade.

**Texas Milkweed & Queen butterfly (Monarch mimic)
By Lonnie Childs**

Zizotes Milkweed, Hierba De Zizotes

(*Asclepias oenotheroides*) also inhabits most of the state and is common but not prevalent in our area. It is less conspicuous, because it is not showy in appearance. Zizote reportedly means "skin sores" in Spanish referring to the fact that this plant was actually used by Native Americans as a poultice for skin rashes. It survives droughts and even your lawnmower. Probably the most recognizable of its features are the wavy leaf structure, since the green flowers tend to blend into the foliage.



Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is one of the showiest of our native Milkweeds and is valued for its large, flat-topped clusters of bright-

Zizotes by Robert L Stone



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

Robyn Nola

Feature Story: Milkweeds—Ambrosia to the Monarchs

orange flowers. It is a 1-1.5 foot somewhat bushy perennial that is not a Monarch favorite for egg-laying, since it contains lower levels of the toxins. Butterfly Milkweed grows in the eastern 2/3 of the state and is not common in the Hill Country, although we have recorded it in the park. To view a nice stand of the species, you can find it in the back section of the Pollinator Garden.



**Monarch butterfly on Butterfly Milkweed
by Lonnie Childs**

Pearl Milkweed Vine, aka Green Milkweed Vine or Net Vein Milkvine, (*Matelea reticulata*) is fairly common in the park and the local area. There are nice stands near the Hummingbird Garden area where the trail descends to the creek.

Although easily overlooked, once you pay attention to it and see its jewel-like flower, it will become easily recognizable and remembered. The species name of *reticulata* describes the reticulated or net veined pattern on the flowers, adding to its attractiveness. It exhibits a five lobed pale green flower with the tiny delicate pearl shape at its center. The pearl shaped structure is a fusion of the stamen and pistil whose evolutionary advantage is unclear to me – maybe just beauty?

Pearl Milkweed Vine is a twining perennial that grows 6-12 feet high by growing through and over other perennials and shrubs. It is typically found on the edges of thickets, woodlands, fence lines, or rocky hillsides where it has structure to grow on and can get part sun to sun.



**Pearl Milkweed Vine
by Lonnie Childs**

This species is endemic to Texas and is mostly found throughout central Texas to the Trans-Pecos region of west Texas with some populations in far south Texas also.

Purple Milkweed Vine, aka Star Milkvine, (*Matelea biflora*) is a common but often over-looked trailing vine that grows up to 2 feet long in chalky soils on open ground and prairies in full sun. Since it is a ground hugger, it will be missed if you are hiking quickly and fail to notice their purple star-shaped flowers, which are tiny but real eye-catchers in the April to July period. The species name, *biflora*, refers to its characteristic of typically growing two flowers from each leaf node. The triangular ovate leaves are opposite and covered with hairs as are the stems.



“Native plants give us a sense of where we are in this great land of ours. I want Texas to look like Texas and Vermont to look like Vermont.”
Lady Bird Johnson

Feature Story: Milkweeds—Ambrosia to the Monarchs

Purple Milkweed Vine grows in Oklahoma, New Mexico, and in Texas from central to north Texas. Remember, if you are hoofing it down a trail and catch a glimpse of a purple star shape in your peripheral vision, stop and take a look. It will be worth it.

If I had to come up with a catch phrase for a Milkweed campaign, it would be preserve, plant, and promote our native Milkweeds. Survey your property to see if you have resident Milkweed species and preserve them. When possible, always plant native species of Milkweed which are increasingly appearing at select nurseries. Although Milkweeds are notoriously difficult to propagate from seeds, seeds are more available, and a few species (Butterfly Milkweed) are more easily propagated. Create a butterfly garden at your residence by planting a variety of nectar plants that will bloom throughout the seasons, but also plant host plants to support the reproductive cycle of butterflies. More specifically, you can become an official Monarch Way Station. Finally, promote Milkweeds to neighbors and friends, and support the Monarch program of your choice.

Now for some information on what can you do to promote Milkweeds and support the continuation of the Monarch migration— one of the true wonders of the natural world.

- **Monarch Watch—Become a Monarch Way Station** <https://www.monarchwatch.org/waystations/>
- **Monarch Joint Venture**—More educational resources <https://monarchjointventure.org/>
- **TPWD Guide for Identification of Texas Milkweeds**
https://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_rp_w7000_1803.pdf
- **Wildflower Center—Milkweed species for Central Texas**
https://www.wildflower.org/collections/collection.php?collection=centex_milkweed
- **Texas Butterfly Ranch**—Another guide for Milkweed species plus news about the Monarch migration in Texas <https://texasbutterflyranch.com>
- **Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas**—the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) provides grants to public gardens for planting of Milkweed and other butterfly nectar and host plants.
<https://npsot.org/wp/monarchs/>



Purple Milkweed Vine
by Lonnie Childs





"Nature holds the key to our aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive and even spiritual satisfaction. "

E. O. Wilson

Recently seen on the Live Oak Trail!



Giant Swallowtail (*Papilio cresphontes*) by Bill Lindemann

**THANKS
FOR
YOUR
SUPPORT!**

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