

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

January, 2023 Volume 4 Number 1

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

The Winter Solstice has passed successfully, and thankfully, the sun will be returning for another year. Some hopeful rains in the fall have quickly subsided to more drought as the La Nina weather pattern continues to dessicate the southern US and drown the northern realms. Meanwhile, this latest cold snap with temps down into the single digits proved to be quite destructive to plants and pipes probably because the initial temperature drop occurred so quickly. As the saying goes, if you don't like the weather, find another planet to live on!

We have our first educational workshop planned for February featuring Monarchs and Milkweed Propagation. Find the details on page 3. Our Education Committee continues to work on planning an exciting lineup of workshops for the balance of the year. We will also hold some guided trail hikes this spring, so look for more details in next month's newsletter.

We are grateful for the financial support that we received this past year which allowed us to complete improvements along the trails and in the gardens. We have two major projects that we would like to fund this year—deer fencing around the Pollinator Garden and an educational installation for the garden. We are appealing for funding to complete those projects and hope that you will consider making an additional donation to support these needs. A third project to install a handrail has been anonymously funded already!

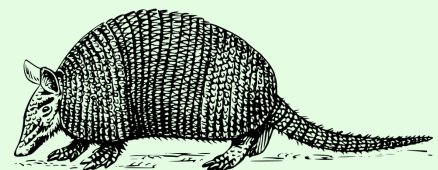
Finally, the City of Fredericksburg's update of their Master Plan and Parks Plan gives you an opportunity to provide input as to what parks improvements are on your wish list. Read my enclosed analysis, and please consider offering support for the goals that we have put forth including our proposed Interpretive Center.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

In this issue:

- Parade Float
- Monarchs & Milkweed Propagation Workshop
- Donation \$\$ at Work & Funding Needs
- Volunteer Spotlight—Deb Youngblood
- Observations Along the Trail
- Learning About Nature is Fun!
- An Appeal for Parks





"As the days grow shorter and the nights grow longer, we are reminded of the cyclical nature of life."

Unknown

FFNC Rocks Out at Light the Night Christmas Parade



On December 2nd, FFNC once again participated in Fredericksburg's "Light the Night" Christmas parade. Our Parade Committee led by Gracie Waggener and assisted by chief float engineer, Tom Hynes, resurrected our Rockin' Robin Café themed float and added more lights and features including a jukebox blasting out some rockin' tunes.

The FFNC rockin' crew included:
Tom Hynes aka Elvis
Jane Crone aka Suzie Q
Trudy Eberhardt aka Peggy Sue
Nancy Person aka Good Golly Miss Molly
Paul Person aka The Fonz
Gracie Waggener aka Little Susie



Many thanks to our Parade Committee for another memorable parade float and for representing FFNC in this community event!



"Don't waste your time chasing butterflies. Mend your garden, and the butterflies will come."

Mario Quintana

February Program: Monarch & Milkweed Propagation

**Please join the Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center
for our first workshop in 2023.**



Monarchs and Milkweed Propagation



Saturday, February 11, 2023

10:00am-12:00pm

Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park Tatsch House, Fredericksburg



This will be a fun hands-on workshop to learn about the plants that monarch butterflies depend on, monarch way station gardens and how to propagate and grow milkweeds. Participants will leave with everything needed to get milkweeds growing for spring planting and gardens started.



Presenters:

Cathy Downs— Monarch Watch Conservation Specialist with Monarch Watch, Past chair of Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas (BBMT), Certified March Larval Monitoring Project educator.

Gracie Waggener— Texas Master Naturalist with 11,000+ volunteer hours including Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas committee. Head Gardener of Pollinator Garden at Fredericksburg Nature Center.

HCMN Advanced Training Code = AT23-008

**To register, send an email to gwaggener@flow-apps.com
Attendance is limited.**





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 Completed Projects—Your Donation \$\$ at Work



Erosion mitigation area in the foreground. The upslopes will be “re-wilded” into a pocket prairie by the install of temporary wattles & seeding with native grasses in the spring.

This area was frequently mowed in the past. The mowing compounded by the drought conditions this past year killed the remaining vegetation & created an erosion problem.



**Refurbished
Trail Signs**



Searching for a volunteer opportunity? While many of our volunteers labor away in the gardens and on the trail at our weekly Tuesday work sessions, we have opportunities for volunteers that do not involve heavy doses of perspiration. We are focused on bolstering our education and communication capabilities which fosters the need for the following volunteer positions. If you have these skills, please consider utilizing your talents in the furtherance of the FFNC missions as we venture towards a future Interpretive Center.

Webmaster

Social Media Coordinator

Children’s Education Program Leader

Adult Education Program Leader

To discuss these opportunities, contact Lonnie Childs at lonniechilds@utexas.edu



"The wise man does not lay up his own treasures. The more he gives to others, the more he has for his own."

Lao Tzu

Funding Needs in 2023

FFNC has three major projects that we would like to fund in 2023 to improve safety, protect our Pollinator Garden, and enhance our educational offering. If you can help with these funding needs, please contact Carl Luckenbach at cluckenbach@sbcglobal.net or Lonnie Childs at lonniechilds@utexas.edu.



#1 Steel Handrail for the steps descending to the Live Oak Creek bridge
\$2,000 funding has been received from an Anonymous donor!!

#2 Historic style fencing to exclude deer from the Pollinator Garden.
Funding need \$6,000



#3 Varrobook educational exhibit for the Pollinator Garden
Funding needed \$7,000



Volunteer Spotlight



Deb Youngblood

In my early childhood, you could always find me out of doors in the swampy coastal prairie that was just south of Hobby Airport in Houston. Spider lilies were a favorite of mine and still are today. My siblings and I gorged on wild blackberries, and my best hiding spot was under a sand plum tree completely surrounded by tall grasses. There, I contentedly nibbled on the most tart of nature's bounty and rested in a nest made by a wild creature of my imaginings. Summer brought dry winds, hot days and wild-fires which my parents and neighbors fought by beating the fire back with wet burlap bags and blankets while small animals scurried ahead of the fire looking for refuge.

As an adult, where ever I went, I have looked to nature for my own refuge. My first posting in the Navy was in Kingsville - back to the coastal prairies. Next, I went to Iceland where I learned about volcanoes and lava fields. On to Hawaii, where I saw lava for the first time, lived on the edge of a jungle, and swam in a tropical paradise. However, it was always the Texas Hill Country that lured me home - the smell of the ashe junipers on a hot summer day, tiny wildflowers hidden in the midst of the grasses, the sound of southerly breezes in the tree tops, and the call of mourning doves and varied tones of mockingbirds.

Some people call this a sense of place. For certain, the place of my childhood was paved over and developed long ago and, while beautiful, the other places I have seen and lived in, were not home. It was always this place, the place where we spent our summers, the Texas Hill Country, where I felt most at home.

Once I settled here, I found myself ignorant of the soil and plants. For sure, the only place I was able to grow anything was where an old goat pen had been. The difference between that spot and any other was immense. I was certain that if I could get enough goat manure I could transform my small plot of Texas, but I instinctively knew that was not the route I should take. Instead, I needed to learn how to work with the soil, climate and plants specific to this region. Becoming a Texas Master Naturalist helped me but working in the Fredericksburg Nature Center's Pollinator Garden was the biggest next step.

As ignorant as I was, Gracie Wagener welcomed me to the Garden. I likely asked more questions than doing anything productive in those first days. However, I am still grateful to her for the knowledge she passed on to me even when I asked the same questions over and over again. These days, I don't need to ask as many





"The greatest use of a life is to spend it on something that will outlast it."

William James

questions and actually get some weeding done, though I still am learning.

I have also worked on trails at Roberts Ranch and still derive great satisfaction from completing the grooming of a trail. At Roberts Ranch, I learned how to photo document plant growth and to understand the importance of a well developed riparian area. Through UGRA, I learned the discipline of water sampling for tracking the health of a river.

Recently, I have watched as the Pedernales River disappeared from view for the longest time ever. The limestone riverbed, a dwindling riparian area, and a few puddles are the only evidence of its existence. I have a water testing kit from LCRA that sits idle, because there is no water in the river to test. Drought exacerbated by rapid development has caused our aquifer levels to drop precipitously. With friends from the area, I have helped to establish the Pedernales River Alliance - Gillespie County. Our primary goal is to protect ground and surface water in the Pedernales River Watershed in Gillespie County from the threat of over-development, pollution and depletion. We work with Hill Country Underground Water Conservation District and County Commissioners to identify areas at risk. We publish information to increase awareness of actions and their effects on the river and aquifer. We are always looking for others who can write, teach and photo document. In the meantime, we continue to learn.

I treasure my early childhood experiences with nature. They opened the natural world to me. From them, I have grown and continued to learn, but make no mistake, I have been taught. Texas Master Naturalists, the Fredericksburg Nature Center and my neighbors who love a dwindling river have taught me and continue to do so. My hope is to join their ranks in teaching others.

Bird Lover Tip of the Month

SLOW BIRDING

Birdwatching can be a competitive sport with lists, contests, and birders racing about to see another must see bird to add to their life list. But a new book, ***Slow Birding: The Art and Science of Enjoying the Birds in Your Own Backyard***, argues that we should slow down and focus on observing the birds in our own backyard. The reward results not from adding to our life list but rather connecting with and gaining insights into the common birds that live amongst us. It is the difference between driving down the highway at 70 mph to enjoy the wildflowers and stopping to walk amongst them and observe their forms, colors, and what species are foraging on them. For more information on Slow Birding, Right Click [HERE](#) and Open Hyperlink.

Observations Along the Trail—Christmas Plants



Possumhaw (*Ilex decidua*) berries make excellent winter feed for birds, especially a marauding horde of Cedar Waxwings. The red berries can be seen conspicuously amongst the bare vegetation of area fence lines during the winter. They are the deciduous cousins to the more eastern species Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*) which is evergreen.



Agarita (*Mahonia trifoliolata*) aka "Texas Holly" appropriately stands out in the bare of winter. Although considered brush to be cleared by many, the fragrant Agarita blooms provide nectar in early spring while its berries afford food for birds & mammals. The Agarita also offers good cover for ground birds and mammals.

Observations Along the Trail



Parralena (*Thymophylla pentachaeta*) aka **Fiveneedle Pricklyleaf** is a low, tufted perennial with prickly leaves that prefers arid, rocky habitat. For identification purposes, rub the prickly leaves and notice that your fingers will host a medicinal smell. This species was the lone bloomer along the trail in November.

Common Gilled Mushroom (Order *Agaricales*) growing in the leaf litter. Mushrooms are the reproductive structures produced by some fungi. It will soon dissolve in a cloud of spores. This one resembles either a fried egg or a safari hat—you decide.





"Nature: the greatest show on earth and admission is free."

Anonymous

Observations Along the Trail



If you search the grounds near the entrance parking area, you will find a maze of **subterranean Termite mud tunnels**. The small, pencil-sized tunnels made by worker termites consist of small pieces of soil and wood that are constructed to protect termites from predators and dry environments while traveling between a food source and the nest. Why we have such a large complex of them is anybody's guess.

Even in the dead of winter, the trail beckons to you. Come take a hike! A winter hike can provide a more serene and contemplative experience.

All Photos by Lonnie Childs



"How can a deer tell when a leaf falls silent in the forest? She hears it breathing differently."

Richard Bach

Deer Friends



I encountered one of our multitude of **White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)** along the trail. She instinctively went into alert mode with pivoting ears and the white-tail flashing *Danger!* to any nearby friends.

Next she turned to notice that it was just another bothersome human hiker. Deer have poor eyesight of only 20/100, and see in 2D. They were once thought to be color-blind but recent studies suggest otherwise. Deer see blues/greens well but not reds/oranges and also have superior night vision. In order to focus on me, her nose had to be pointed straight at me.



Finally, she perceived no danger and sauntered off in an aggravated state, since I had disturbed her nap. When you hear a Deer snort or stomp, it serves as a warning to others & is not an insult hurled at you. The overpopulation of Deer at the park is problematic in its impact on the native vegetation.

All Photos by Lonnie Childs





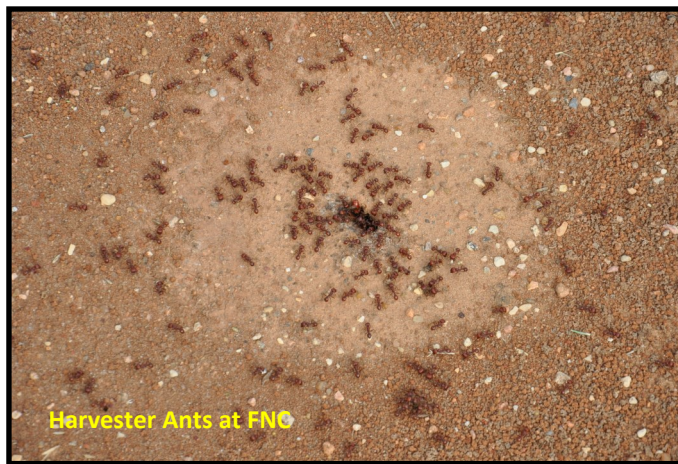
"Ants have the most complicated social organization on earth next to humans."

E. O. Wilson

Learning About Nature is Fun!

Fun Facts About Ants

- There are 12,000 known species of ants on earth living from the Arctic to the tropics and totaling 20 quadrillion (20 million billion) individuals which equates to 2.5 million for each human.
- Ants are ecosystem engineers because they play a crucial role in decomposing organic matter, recycling nutrients, improving soil health, removing pests and dispersing seeds .
- Ant species represent one of the most diverse and specialist groups of animals on the planet. Leaf-cutter ants are fungus farmers, slave-making ants capture broods to increase their work force, while wood ants herd aphids to the juiciest parts of a plant to harvest their honeydew sap.
- Queen ants can live more than 30 years – yet have the same genetic material as a short-lived worker ant.
- The evolution of plants and ants are closely linked.
- Texas hosts more than 250 species of native Ants. Unfortunately, we also harbor Red Imported Fire Ants which hitch-hiked a ride on a ship from South America to Mobile, Alabama, in the the late 1930's.



Harvester Ants at FNC

**Source: "Insects and us: a mind-blowing 20 quadrillion ants and what they mean for the planet",
The Guardian by Anna Turns**

Imported Fire Ants are fair game for elimination, but please help preserve our native species.

Nature's News of the Weird

How a See-Through Frog Hides Its Red Blood From Predators

Right Click [here](#) & Open Link



"A walk through the woods probably won't change what's wrong, but it can change how we respond to it."

Heidi Barr, 12 yrs old

An Appeal for Parks

by Lonnie Childs

I have previously written about the importance of the human connection to our natural surroundings. The eminent evolutionary biologist, E.O. Wilson, wrote a book in 1984 entitled, *Biophilia*, which introduced us to the concept of the biophilia hypothesis "that humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with Nature and other forms of life." More specifically, Wilson defines Biophilia as "the urge to affiliate with other forms of life." Unfortunately, our modern life and urban designs increasingly separate us from the natural world or worse yet eliminate the green space around us.

Richard Louv in his ground-breaking book, *Last Child in the Woods—Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, introduced us to the term, "Nature Deficit Disorder", to describe the potential negative effects to individual health and the social fabric as children spend increasing time indoors to the detriment of physical interaction with the natural world in unstructured, solitary settings. Louv cites research from practitioners of many disciplines pointing to an array of physical and mental problems in youth associated with a nature-deficient childhood. Louv's entreaty to us was that we need to increase the green space and opportunities for our youth to access experiences in nature for their healthy development.

On a more positive note, scientific studies have increasingly affirmed the positive health benefits of spending time in natural landscapes. In one study, a 20 minute walk in nature resulted in a 13% decrease in the stress hormone Cortisol which in term helps boost the Immune System. Additionally, study participants experienced a 5.8% decrease in heart rate. According to the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy, "One study of a group of Outward Bound participants found they performed 50 percent better on creative problem-solving tasks after three days of wilderness backpacking." The Japanese pioneered the term of "forest bathing" as expressed in the phrase *shinrin-yoku*, which represents their strong belief in the healing powers of immersion in nature. I could go on ad nauseum citing medical studies that purport the health benefits resulting from increased natural experiences, but I speculate that we could all just agree that nature is a great antidote for the stresses of modern life and contributes to the healthy development of youth.

How are we doing in Fredericksburg for accessibility to natural settings and green space? Our city has nine parks which offer a mix of services. Following is an analysis of current park acreage and features.

Park	Recreational Services	Accessibility	Acreage
1) Lady Bird Johnson	All—sports, events, nature park	Poor	260
2) Cross Mountain	Nature trails & wilderness	Poor	10
3) Ft Martin Scott	Historical, nature trail	Poor	15
4) Old Fair	Sports	Fair	10
5) Oak Crest	Sports	Poor	10 + 42 ^{open}
6) Frantzen	Green space	Excellent	1.8
7) Elementary School	Playgournd, open space	Excellent	10
8) Marktplatz	Playground, event space	Fair	4.5
9) Town Pool	Pool, Splash pad in work	Good	1
TOTAL			364.3



*"In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man,
in spite of real sorrows."* **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

An Appeal for Parks

by Lonnie Childs

My personal assessment of our park offerings and needs suggests several areas for improvements. **First**, I would note the **lack of neighborhood parks**, defined as an *"attractive neighborhood setting and a place for passive recreation for people of all ages. The area should have trees to give protection from the sun during the summer."* Most of our parks require driving via auto to reach them. Only Frantzen and Elementary School qualify as truly neighborhood parks.

Second, we suffer a **lack of wilderness area** (approximately 27 acres or 7.5% of total) in our park space. We have pockets of natural landscapes spread across three parks with Fredericksburg Nature Center being the largest at 15 acres. Additionally, the combined length of nature trails from three separate parks totals less than three miles. If you want to do some nature-bathing, you will have to do it quickly!

Third, furthering the theme of **lack of accessibility**, there is no connectivity between existing parks and neighborhoods or pathways for pedestrians to walk or bike through town. The only opportunity for families and youth to engage in these activities is to take an adventurous trip through our proliferating traffic or drive to LBJ Park.

Fourth, we should focus on providing **more recreational programming**, specifically topics on environmental learning for youth and adults. FFNC is committed to re-energizing our educational programs in 2023. Our proposal to construct an Interpretive Center in the future will be a continuation of this commitment and enable a broader array of educational offerings and capabilities.

Finally, the sum of Fredericksburg park space totals 364 acres with 260 acres (71%) of those encompassed by LBJ Park. If you compare our total park space against the National Parks and Recreation Association guidelines, Fredericksburg well exceeds the recommended green space per population size (6-10 ac per 1,000 people), but we do have a **geographical distribution issue**. If you only consider the accessible park space located within the town proper (eliminating LBJ, Ft. Martin Scott, & Oak Crest), then we fall to half the recommended minimum park space per capita.

The cautionary tale for the future of Fredericksburg's parks is the risk that our burgeoning growth will require additional park space but will in fact consume more and more of our available green space and wilderness areas. While the city is surrounded by ample green space, virtually all of it is private land not accessible to the general population. Additionally, wilderness areas (*natural environments that have not been significantly*

Fredericksburg Parks & Recreation Dept. goals:

- A system of outstanding parks and open space area which are responsive to the leisure needs of a growing community and sensitive to the conservation of natural resources.
- Recreational facilities, programs and park areas that meet the needs of a diverse population with various levels of ability and skill.
- An equitable geographic distribution of parks and recreational facilities.
- Orderly replacement and/or re-design of aging parks and recreational infrastructure to ensure existing recreational opportunities are not lost.
- Cooperation with the school district, county and other agencies, as well as community organizations, to provide cost-effective services and optimize benefits to citizens.
- A Comprehensive Trail System that meets the needs of Fredericksburg residents

Source:

<https://www.fbgtx.org/161/Parks-Recreation>



“There are no words that can tell the hidden spirit of the wilderness, that can reveal its mystery, its melancholy, and its charm.”

Theodore Roosevelt

An Appeal for Parks

by Lonnie Childs

modified by human activity) are almost non-existent within the city’s extra territorial jurisdiction. The old adage applies that they are not making any more land. We have a great foundation with our current parks system, but we can improve them and need to ensure the availability of space for future park needs.

My personal recommendations for improving the future of Fredericksburg city parks are the following.

- 1. Increase neighborhood park space**
- 2. Increase access to undeveloped green space and wilderness areas in our parks**
- 3. Improve connectivity to parks via hike/bike pathways**
- 4. Advocate for construction of an Interpretive Center at the Fredericksburg Nature Center to support more environmental education programming**

How can you influence the future of Fredericksburg’s parks?

The City is currently updating their Master Plan and Parks Plan.

You can provide input to the Master Plan and Parks Plan by submitting a comment **via the Online Form or Email** by going to

<https://www.fbgtx.org/1128/Comprehensive-Plan-Update-and-Parks-Mast>

Or attend one of the planned community input sessions (see announcement next page).

If you love parks and support FNC, please take time to do your civic duty!!



Rufous Hummingbird by Bill Lindemann



"Wilderness is not a luxury but necessity of the human spirit."

Edward Abbey

Community Forum for Master Plan



PRESS RELEASE

For More Information Contact:

Lea Feuge

Public Information Officer

City of Fredericksburg

(830)997-7521

LFeuge@fbgtx.org

For Immediate Release: January 3, 2023

Open House Scheduled for 2023 Comprehensive Plan and Parks Master Plan Updates - Community Input Wanted!

Fredericksburg, TX - The City of Fredericksburg is continuing to grow and plans to maintain the way of life our community expects. One of the main ways the City can plan for this future is through periodic updates to its Comprehensive Plan and utilizing master planning efforts.

The City of Fredericksburg, along with Halff Associates, Inc., will be hosting the first Open House in a come and go type event to gather input and discuss the 2023 Comprehensive Plan and Parks Master Plan updates with the community where they can meet directly with staff and the consultants. **The Open House will be taking place on Wednesday, January 18, 2023, from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary of the Pioneer Museum located at 312 West San Antonio Street in Fredericksburg.**

The planning process and the resulting policies will be critical to the City's ability to promote and manage growth, protect, and enhance key areas of importance while accommodating future trends. This includes identifying what makes the City of Fredericksburg unique, establishing the vision of how Fredericksburg will continue to grow, and determining how Fredericksburg achieves that vision through ongoing execution of the implementation action plan. Once adopted, these plans will be regarded as long-range statements of public policy.

We want to hear from you! Please join us at the Open House on January 18th. More information about the Comprehensive Plan and Parks Master Plan updates, as well as a survey, are available online at <https://www.fbgtx.org/FBGCompPlan2023>.



**"The richness I achieve comes from Nature, the source of my inspiration."
Claude Monet**

It's time to renew your membership!

**Please consider joining or
renewing your FFNC membership or donating
to the Bill Lindemann Capital Fund.**

To join or donate, go to

<https://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com/membership/>

Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center Board of Directors

Lonnie Childs—President

Paul Person—Vice-president

Carl Luckenbach - Treasurer

Gracie Waggener—Secretary

Jane Crone

Billy Guin

Tom Musselman

Mary Ellen Terell

**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**