

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

March, 2023 Volume 4 Number 3

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

Spring is a time of budding, re-leaving, blooming, and birds returning to their summer homes. I've observed Redbuds in flowering, blooming Bluebonnets, Purple Martins announcing their return, and heard the piercing mating call of a male Northern Cardinal ringing down Live Oak Creek. The weather has been unkind, but still Mother Nature answers the call of Spring, improving my mood and re-kindling the spirit

FFNC volunteers have been busy getting the gardens ready, continuing with trail improvements, and organizing a slate of workshops and guided hikes for 2023. Peruse the schedule on page 2, and save your dates for some informative and entertaining events that will both teach and inspire.

The Interpretive Center Advisory Committee continues their work on completing the Concept Phase of our project. In the January issue, I detailed the proposed components and features of our Center. Our current effort has been to finalize the details for planning purposes and in preparation for an upcoming City Council meeting to present our initial plan. We have chosen two potential sites at the entrance of LBJ Municipal Park, both of which will suit our needs. More detailed sight work and planning will flesh out the winner.

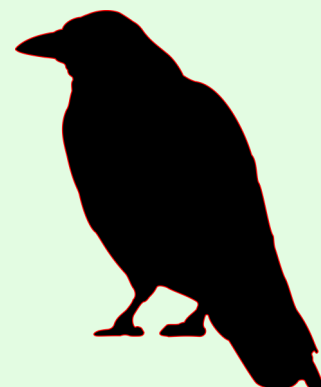
Finally, there is no deadline for joining our organization or providing financial support for FFNC. We have some specific funding and material needs detailed on page 7, so please consider making a commitment of your support.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

In this issue:

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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"*

FFNC Announces the 2023 Workshop & Hike Schedule

Educational Workshops at Fredericksburg Nature Center in 2023

All Workshop times are from 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 Noon.

Workshops are free, but donations are graciously accepted

April 19	INaturalist for Science – Learning and Fun! AT23-054 Presenter: Craig Hensley, Texas Parks & Wildlife Biologist Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, Tatsch House
June 16	Native Bees and Bee Habitat AT23-065 Presenter: Molly Keck, Texas Agri-Life Extension Fredericksburg Agri-Life Extension Office
August 19	Solar Eclipses and Other Dark Skies AT23-056 Presenter: Jeff Stone, Retired NASA Engineer Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, Tatsch House
September 13	Monarchs and Milkweed Propagation II AT23-083 Presenter: Cathy Downs, Hill Country Master Naturalist Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, Tatsch House
October 28	Learning Through Nature Journaling AT23-064 Presenter: Nancy Huffman, Hill Country Master Naturalist Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, Tatsch House

Trail Walks and Talks for Spring, 2023

Hike durations are from 9:00-10:30am & are about 1 mile in length.

Hikes start at the Live Oak Wilderness Trailhead at Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park.

April 1	Trail Ecosystem Walk and Talk "The Seven Micro-habitats of FNC" A23-055 Hike Leader: Trudy Eberhardt, Hill Country Master Naturalist
May 6	Trail Ecosystem Walk and Talk "The Wildflowers of FNC" A23-066 Hike Leader: Bill Guin, Hill Country Master Naturalist

For more details on the Workshops and Guided Hikes, go to <https://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com/event/>



"Life is better in hiking boots."

Anonymous

Trail Ecosystem Walk and Talk

"The Seven Micro-habitats of FNC"

Hike Leader: Trudy Eberhardt, Hill Country Master Naturalist

When: April 1 9:00-10:30am

Where: Live Oak Trail at Lady Bird Johnson Mun. Park

HCMN Advanced Training: A23-055

Pre-register via email to Trudy.eberhardt@gmail.com

The walk will begin at the entrance kiosk near the start of the trailhead directly across Lady Bird Drive from the park office. Look for the green and white sign that denotes "Fredericksburg Nature Center."



We will take a hike of approximately 45-60 minutes and 1 mile in length along a loop trail which parallels Live Oak Creek. The hike will venture through all of the seven micro-habitats contained within FNC. You will learn about habitats, their characteristics, and why healthy habitats are essential to the preservation of our natural resources in the Hill Country. The talk will discuss the features of the various micro-habitats at FNC and the types of vegetation and animals that reside there. If rainfall allows, you will see many wildflowers which will be identified and discussed.

Along the way, you will also view a Butterfly Habitat, Bird Blind, and Pollinator Garden, all of which are man-made habitats constructed to mimic natural habitats and attract birds and pollinators.

The hike will be easy to moderate with a few short sections of difficult terrain. Participants should wear good hiking shoes, comfortable clothing, & a hat. Bring a bottle of water & a hiking stick if needed.

Trudy Eberhardt is a 2021 Texas Master Naturalist graduate and has been on its New Class Committee for two years. She retired from a long career in corporate accounting and finance in 2019 and immediately moved to the Texas hill country from New Mexico. Her current list of activities include digging for artifacts and board membership with the Hill Country Archeological Association, garden and trail maintenance at the Fredericksburg Nature Center, pollinator garden maintenance at Bandera Natural History Museum and grounds maintenance and teaching nature to 2nd and 4th graders at Riverside Nature Center in Kerrville and trail building at Roberts Ranch in Comfort. She is also the Membership Director of the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT), Kerrville Chapter, a member of the NPSOT Fredericksburg chapter and assists with the Pollinator Garden Assistance and Recognition Program (PGARP) which is a joint project with a network of Texas Master Naturalist and Native Plant Society volunteers. In her spare time she enjoys woodcarving, watercolor painting, motorcycle riding, gardening, riparian clean up, volunteering at a draft horse sanctuary, and spending time with her husband Paul and GSD Sorsha.



"My mission is to document endangered species and landscapes in order to show a world worth saving"

Joel Sartore

April Program: iNaturalist

Nature Series, Part II –iNaturalist for Science – Learning and Fun

Presenter: Craig Hensley, TPWD Biologist AT23-054
When: April 19, 2023 10:00-12:00 noon
Where: Tatsch House at
Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park in Fredericksburg

Join the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center in welcoming Craig Hensley, our favorite Texas Parks and Wildlife Nature Trackers Biologist. His presentation will focus on using the iNaturalist app as a tool for learning and contributing to citizen science efforts. The iNaturalist app provides users the opportunity to not only learn more about nature but to also provide a better understanding of the flora and fauna of an area, whether in Texas parks, nature centers, or in your own backyard. During this presentation, you will learn how to download and use the app, how to apply it to your property or elsewhere, and how to improve your photography skills with your cell phone. You will also find out how you can participate in the iNaturalist City Nature Challenge which will be taking place April 29-May 1, 2023.



Seating is limited for this free program (donations are accepted). Please pre-register as soon as possible by contacting Gracie Waggener at gwaggener@flow-apps.com.

Craig Hensley is a life-long naturalist and educator, having shared his passion for and love of the natural world with audiences from Minnesota and Nebraska and across Texas. He has served as a Texas Nature Trackers Biologist for more than three years after a one-year stint as Wildlife Biologist for Comal and Kendall Counties, and more than eight years as the Park Interpreter at Guadalupe River State Park.

More about iNaturalist: *iNaturalist is a joint initiative of the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society. Its mission is to build a global community of 100 million naturalists by 2030 in order to connect people to nature and advance biodiversity science and conservation. It's a crowdsourced species identification system and an organism occurrence recording tool. You can use it to record your own observations, get help with identifications, collaborate with others to collect this kind of information for a common purpose, or access the observational data collected by iNaturalist users . <https://www.inaturalist.org/>*
Download the iNaturalist app for free from the Appstore or Google Play.



"Volunteerism is the voice of the people put into action. These actions shape and mold the present into a future of which we can all be proud."

Helen Dyer

FFNC Volunteer Opportunities

Tuesday Fundays at FNC are resuming with Spring!

Trail Work—We continue to perform trail maintenance and do improvement projects.

Gardening Activities have resumed with spring cleaning, trimming, and weeding.

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.

If you would like to join us at the park, we would love to have you!

Work sessions are typically scheduled for **Tuesday at 8:30am.**

Contact Gracie Waggener at gwaggener@flow-apps.com to receive a weekly email notification about scheduled work tasks for the coming week.

Searching for a volunteer opportunity that does not involve manual labor? 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.

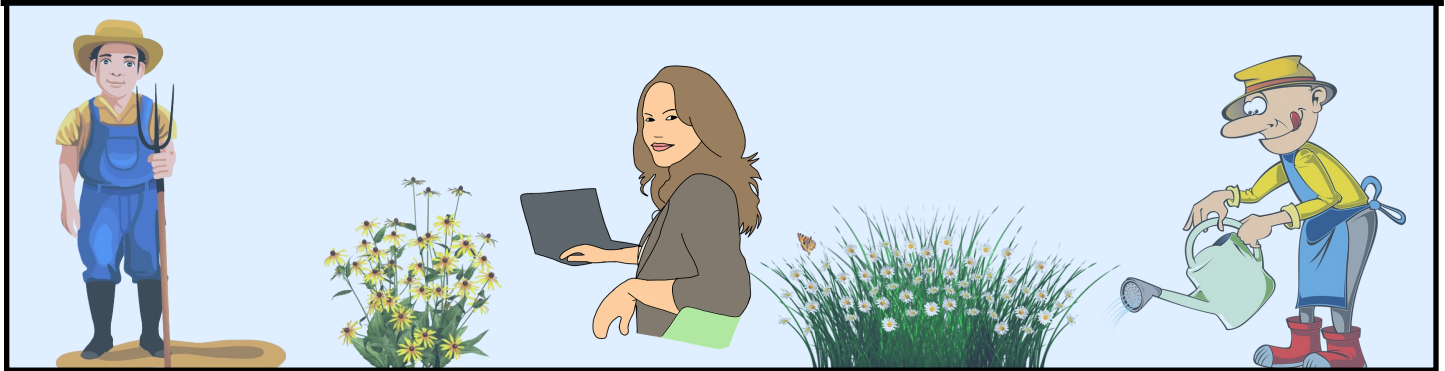
Webmaster

Social Media Coordinator

Children's Education Program Leader

Adult Education Program Leader

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





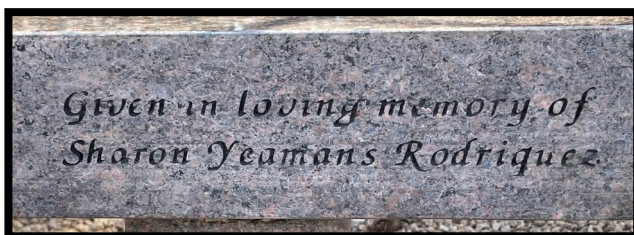
Who built the Fredericksburg Nature Center? Volunteers like you!

Hummingbird & Cactus Garden Makeover

Patti Guin has been leading a refresh of the Cactus & Hummingbird Garden at the turnaround of the Live Oak Wilderness Trail. At right, she demonstrates water flowing from our newly installed water system consisting of a larger tank with a solar powered pump. The system was designed and installed by our Chief Engineer, **Tom Hynes**, along with help from **Frank Garcia & Billy Guin**. Check it out on your next hike!



Members of our Volunteer Corps celebrate the installation of the new watering system. From left to right, **Carol Knutson**, **Gracie Waggener**, **Martha Beste**, **Billy Guin**, **Frank Garcia** (kneeling), **Mary Ellen Terrell**, **Tom Hynes**, **Patti Guin**.



A limestone lined pad was installed around the bench memorializing our beloved volunteer, **Sharon Rodriguez**, who tended the Hummingbird Garden for many years and passed away in 2022. Stop for a moment of repose on the bench & enjoy the gardens.



Sharon's Bench

Photos by Lonnie Childs



"Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you plant."

Robert Louis Stevenson

Funding & Material Needs in 2023

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



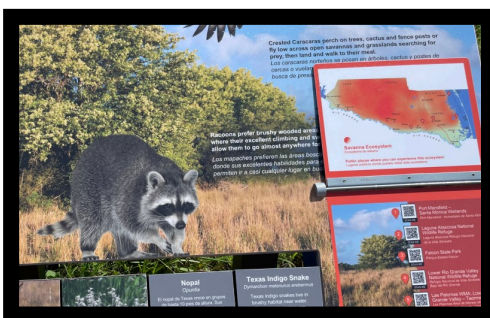
#1 Steel Handrail for the steps descending to the Live Oak Creek bridge

**Funding need = \$2,000
Funded!**



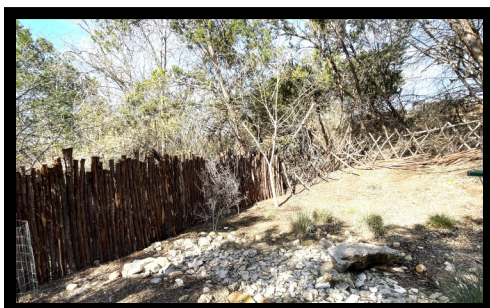
#2 Historic style fencing to exclude deer from the Pollinator Garden.

**Funding need = \$6,000
Funding received = \$3550 \$2450 to go!**



#3 Varrobook educational exhibit for the Pollinator Garden.

Funding need = \$7,000



#4 Completion of picket fence around Bird Blind to exclude deer.

Materials need = Qty of ~ 300 x 2"x 5-6' cedar pickets.



"Birds are beautiful and amazing creatures, until you walk underneath one who had a big lunch."

Terri Guillemet

Northern Pintails (*Anas acuta*)

spending the winter on Live Oak Creek
& hanging out with our flock of
domestic ducks.



Photo by John Terry

Bird Lover Tip of the Month



Preventing Window Collisions

Preventing our beloved birds from suffering a death crash into our windows has long been a dilemma for bird lovers. Many of us have tried window stickers with little result. Patsy Inglet educated us in her Bird Migration workshop that birds have a very narrow field of vision, such that stickers would need to be closely spaced to be effective.

Another technique which two friends have found to be effective is to build a grid curtain of paracord which addresses the need for a tight grid pattern that birds will detect and does not obscure your view. You can learn how to make your own or you can also buy pre-fabricated "Zen" Curtains at Acopian Birdsavers

<https://www.birdsavers.com/>

For more information on other techniques that you might try to prevent collisions, go to

https://worldbirds.com/how-to-stop-birds-from-flying-into-windows/?utm_source=pocket_saves

"Spring is Nature's way of saying, Let's Party!"

Robin Williams

Heralds of Spring



Mexican Plum *Prunus Mexicana*

Plays host to an Italian Honeybee (*Apis mellifera ligustica*). Mexican Plum is an early spring bloomer that emits a mellifluous aroma pleasing the noses of humans and bees alike. Mexican Plums do produce edible fruit which are somewhat tart.

Agarita *Mahonia trifoliolata*

Agarita shrubs burst out in bloom by early March and also exude a pleasing aroma which can be quite noticeable arising from an Agarita clump. Their berries provide fodder for birds and small mammals and can be used to produce jelly.



Coral Honeysuckle *Lonicera sempervirens*

This native of the eastern US & E. Texas grows well here in cultivated beds with some extra watering. It is a mostly evergreen vine that produces spectacular clusters of red tubular flowers guaranteed to attract Hummingbirds. Why plant an invasive Japanese Honeysuckle when this is readily available?



Photos by Dot Maginot

**"What did the tree say after a long winter?
What a re-leaf ..."**

NIC LOYD & LINDA WEIFORD

Heralds of Spring



Sandyland Bluebonnet
(*Lupinus subcarnosa*)

Found blooming in the sandy soils on the sandstone bluff, this disjunct population of Bluebonnets exists 100 miles from its normal geographic distribution southeast of San Antonio.

A clump of Nipple or Pineapple Cactus (*Coryphanta sulcata*) displaying its nipple shaped fruits. It produces pale yellow flowers which are quite attractive.



Chartreuse Tiger Beetle
(*Cicindela scutellaris flavoviridis*)

This sub-species, part of a species that is prevalent in North America, is found in only in a narrow geographic band from north central to central Texas. They are considered beneficial predators who prey on the harmful insects in your garden.



Photos by Dot Maginot



"The birders I encountered in books and in the world shared little in common except this simple secret: if you listen to birds, every day will have a song in it."
Kyo Maclea

Purple Martins Return & Trumpet the Return of Spring



Photos by Dot Maginot

Our **Purple Martin (*Progne subis*)** colony returned to FNC on February 17th after weeks of flying almost 4,000 miles from South America. They both drink & eat while in flight! Nothing heralds the eminent arrival of spring like the "*chirp, chortle, rattle, and croak*" of a chattering colony. Enjoy their song by Right Clicking [Here](#) & "Open Hyperlink." Better yet, come out to FNC to hear them live & enjoy their acrobatic show.



***"In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore ...
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."***

The Raven by Edgar Allen Poe

Feature Story: The Common Raven by Lonnie Childs

The **Common Raven** (*Corvus corax*) has co-existed with humans for thousands of years in which time it has embedded itself in our literature, folklore, and mythology around the world. Poe utilized the Raven to convey the overpowering grip of grief and death which reflects the Western tradition of portraying the birds as omens of death and evil. Perhaps the visage of a black bird that singularly shows up unexpectedly to peer down at you insinuates ill motives. The captive Ravens at the Tower of London are beloved, but legend suggests that if they ever leave the tower, the British Empire will crumble. Perhaps they might have slipped away one night, and no one noticed, because the Empire is no more.



Photo by Lonnie Childs

For Native Americans in the western US, the Raven assumes a dichotomous place in their mythology. They considered them a trickster but also the creator of light in a sense. The Raven reportedly stole it from the sun! Although the people were thankful for his beneficial deed, they recognized that he was a maker of mayhem and mischief who was not to be trusted.

My own perception of the Raven has evolved over time mostly through numerous interactions with them in the desert southwest. I have been forced several times to guard my sandwich to keep the corvine thief at bay, because they always seem to show up coveting your lunch. More often than not, I have observed them, alerted first by their raucous call, flying in escape from a much smaller aggrieved bird who is frantically trying to no avail to retrieve its eggs that the Raven has pilfered. How could anyone appreciate much less like this noisome scamp of a bird?

When you experience the acrobatic display by a heavy-bodied Raven on a windy day, your sentiments may be stirred as you begin to realize that they are more than a portly prankster. Learning about their intelligence and problem-solving skills may also influence you to not discount them as thick-headed thugs. I have even begun to chuckle and not wince when I hear their Jimmy Durante (Boomer reference for my younger readers) voice deliver a one-liner of comic croak. Ravens have personality, even if it is not always pleasant. I am not sure how this reflects on me, but I will admit to you today that I have joined the Friends of the Raven Club. Let's explore some facts.

Corvus corax resides around the globe in the Northern Hemisphere and is often segmented into eight sub-species. The sub-species which inhabits central Texas is *C. corax principalis*, and its geographic distribution

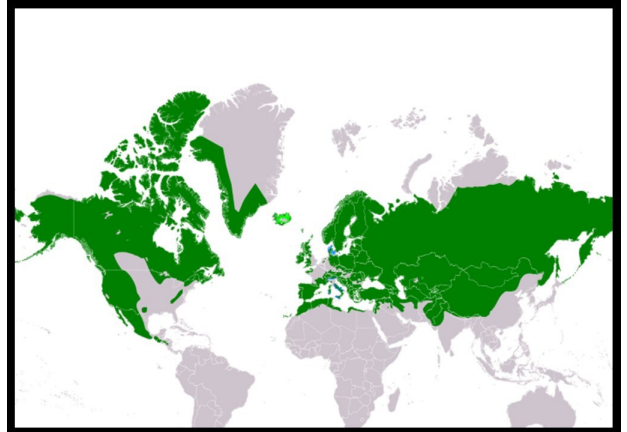


*"There were three ravens sat on a tree, ...
The one of them said to his mate,
Where shall we our breakfast take?"*

The Three Ravens (English folk song)

Feature Story: The Common Raven

encompasses the western US, Canada, and down into New England. The distribution of the Common Raven has steadily increased in recent history due to the ubiquitous presence of garbage dumps as a food source. They evolved in the Old World and migrated to North America via the Bering Strait land bridge, perhaps following the migrating humans. We also do enjoy an occasional sighting in our area of the Chihuahuan Raven which also inhabits the western US.



Range of *Corvus corax*
By SanoAK: Alexander Kürthy^a

Ravens represent the heaviest of the passerine (perching) birds weighing as much as 4.5 lbs and stretching in length up to 26". They sport a thick slightly curved bill, black iridescent plumage, and elongated feathers which ring their neck and appear like feathered boa. They also exhibit impressively long tail feathers.

Ravens are omnivorous opportunistic feeders which partially explains their ability to thrive and survive. In some places they are mainly scavengers, feeding on carrion and the associated vermin. They are not equipped to tear through large-bodied carrion so must wait for the prey to be torn open by another predator and are even known to associate with wolves, as a kleptoparasite, following them to scavenge wolf-kills in winter. Ravens also eat the afterbirth of large mammals and prey on small invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals and birds. As I mentioned earlier, they plunder bird nests, brazenly picking off eggs, nestlings and sometimes adult birds.

Plant food includes cereal grains, acorns, buds, berries and fruit. Human food waste has become a favorite either due to its delectability, high cholesterol, and/or increasing prevalence. Ravens may store surplus food and will learn to cache it away out of the purview of other cousins and competitors. Whether it is well balanced or not, Ravens certainly have a well varied diet.



Common Ravens form breeding bonds that are probably life-long, and a pair will stake out a nesting territory to be defended from other interlopers. They prefer wooded areas with large expanses of open land nearby and ample food sources. At FNC, we have a breeding pair that seems to patrol the Live Oak Creek watershed—pretty nice habitat! Because of their mating and territorial habits, you will typically observe only an individual or the pair, although young

Beloved Tower of London Raven
By Fernando Losada Rodríguez



"On the road to wisdom, behave like a raven and observe everything carefully!"
Mehmet Murat Ildan

Feature Story: The Common Raven

adults without mates may form flocks.

Despite their portly bodies, Common Ravens show themselves to be acrobatic flyers capable of impressive aerial feats such as doing rolls and somersaults in the air. One bird was observed flying upside down for more than a half-mile. Young birds have been spotted playing games with sticks, repeatedly dropping them, then diving to catch them in midair. The birds are also adept soarers, able to defeat or take advantage of winds with the reign of agile wing movements. If a Common Raven flies overhead at a low enough altitude, you may hear the rustling sound of their wingbeats.

Common Ravens may be "bird brains", but they are one of the largest "bird brains." Examples of the intelligence of Common Ravens are widespread, and here are a few. They are dangerous predators because of their ability to coordinate their tactics, with one bird distracting an incubating adult and the other waiting to grab an egg or chick as soon as it's uncovered. They appear to call in wolves to prey and may call to recruit their unmated friends in to a bonanza carrion buffet where their numbers can overwhelm the local residents.

Ravens have also proven to be capable of understanding cause and effect. A study in Wyoming discovered that gunshots draw Ravens in to investigate a presumed carcass, whereas the birds ignore sounds that are just as loud but harmless. Experiments have also shown them to be capable of trial and error learning. Another study demonstrated their ability to engage in displacement behavior which is the "capacity to communicate about objects or events that are distant in space or time" (ex. communicating a food source find to others). Finally, Ravens can mimic environmental sounds and the calls of other birds as well as human speech—"Nevermore. Nevermore."

Distinguishing Ravens from Crows

- Ravens are larger with bigger curvier beaks
- Ravens have a ruffle of feathers around their neck
- Ravens fly alone or in pairs mostly while Crows fly in a murder (flock)
- Ravens ride the thermals and soar, whereas crows do more flapping
- The Raven's tail is wedge-shaped while Crows have a rounded fan-shaped tail
- Ravens loudly *croak* while crows *caw* and *purr*
- Right Click [HERE](#) & Open Hyperlink to **hear the Raven**



Photo by Sergey Yeliseev

I'll argue in closing that despite their mischievous personality, Common Ravens are amazing birds with multi-faceted abilities that not only make them superior predators, but also interesting and entertaining birds. Next time you see a large black bird flying solo, stop and observe. You might find yourself impressed.



"There is no quiet place in the white man's cities...."
Chief Seattle 1856

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/>

Dot Maginot

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 Andrea Schmidt, Dir. Fbg. Parks & Recreation, ex officio

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

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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**