

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

April, 2023 Volume 4 Number 4

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

We've been allotted just enough rain such that the plants woke up to realize that Spring has arrived. Not a great wildflower season, but it's a blessing to see any wildflower at this juncture. We need some sustaining rain, so pray for El Nino to arrive soon. The same old drought story, just a new chapter.

FFNC has a busy schedule for April and May with our iNaturalist program, a bioblitz as part of the City Nature Challenge, and another guided hike. We just completed a cedar fence enclosure around the Bird Blind and have plans to do the same at the Pollinator Garden as well add a handrail along the trail ascent to Live Oak Creek. Our volunteer corps has been busy, but there is always space for more to join!

Fredericksburg city government is allowing you another opportunity to provide input on our parks system where we hope that you will advocate for our proposed Interpretive Center. See the update on our project status, and note that I will be presenting to the City Council on May 2nd to seek conditional approval to proceed with our Design Phase and initiate active fundraising.

This is primetime at FNC with budding plants, wildflowers erupting, and the Spring bird migration stirring into motion. Which all means that there is no better time for a walk in the park with a stop at the Bird Blind or one of our gardens. A dose of nature will lift the spirits and lower the blood pressure.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

In this issue:

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- Thanks to our Donors
- Interpretive Center Project Status
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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 Volunteer Opportunities

Tuesday Fundays at FNC are in full Spring swing!

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

Children’s Education Program Leader

Adult Education Program Leader

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





"It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see."

Henry David Thoreau

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.



A few seats remain 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. 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.

To participate in the iNaturalist City Nature Challenge, come out to FNC on April 28 @ 9am for a bioblitz. Just show up with your smartphone loaded with the iNaturalist app.



“A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his father, but borrowed from his children.”

John James Audubon

May Trail Ecosystem Walk and Talk

“The Wildflowers of FNC”

Hike Leader: Billy Guin, Hill Country Master Naturalist

When: May 6 9:00-10:30am

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

HCMN Advanced Training: A23-066

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 briefly learn about habitats, their characteristics, and why healthy habitats are essential to the preservation of our natural resources in the Hill Country. The hike will focus on the many wildflowers inhabiting FNC 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 Pollinator Garden will present a large array of native flowers designed to attract pollinators and will inform you about the many great choices of native wildflowers that you might plant in your home landscape.

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.

Billy Guin is a 2019 Texas Master Naturalist graduate and currently serves as the TMN Coordinator of the Land Management Assistance Program (LMAP). Billy is also a member of the Native Plant Society of Texas. As a Board member of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center, he works on the trails and other improvements at the Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park. He and his wife, Patti, live on 20 acres north of Fredericksburg, and spend their time nurturing the native trees, grasses, shrubs and forbs that thrive there. Tagged by his wife as a “bermaholic,” he has built numerous rock, log/limb and dirt berms, as well as dry creek beds, throughout the property to capture water and prevent erosion. An avid bowhunter, he enjoys the outdoors and the bounty it produces.



**"The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it."
Henry David Thoreau**

Thanks to our Donors & Members!



Checking out the new cedar post fencing that will completely enclose the Bird Blind and exclude our voracious deer are **Frank Garcia, Tom Hynes, Tom Musselman, Nicholas Gonzelez (fence contractor), and Lonnie Childs.**

Many thanks go to two Anonymous donors and Frank Garcia for funding this effort!

The following generously donated to help fund fencing around the Bird Blind, a handrail to be built on the ascent to the creek, and fencing to enclose the Pollinator Garden.

Anonymous

Dottie Leslie Memorials

Rebecca Taylor

Lonnie & Valarie Childs

Carl Luckenbach

Mary Walsh

Frank Garcia

Tom Musselman

Anonymous

Carol Knutson

Susan Rust

Thanks to all our new Members & those who renewed!



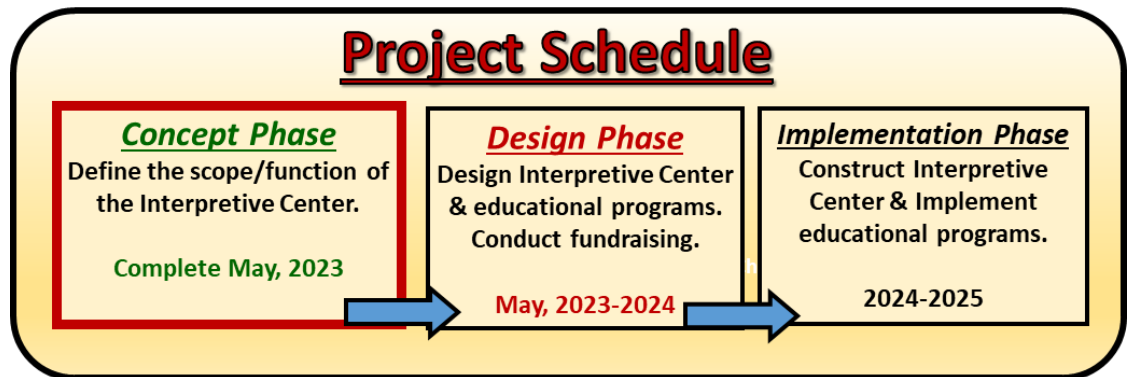
Project Mission:

To provide enhanced environmental learning capabilities through the implementation of additional educational programming resources & the construction of a supporting facility.

Our Interpretive Center Project Moves Forward

Our FNC Advisory Committee has been busy completing our Concept Scope document based on our intelligence gathering at eleven different nature centers and input from our committee members, volunteer corps, and community members. We have completed a scope document that defines the proposed features and educational programming that we would like to offer at a future Interpretive Center facility. Our next step is a presentation to the City Council on May 2nd to gain their conditional approval to move forward to the Design Phase and initiate active fundraising.

Current Status:



Interpretive Center

Project Scope includes:

Educational programming objectives:

- Paid educational programming staff
- Exhibits – exterior & interior, interactive, self-guided
- Nature programs focused on pre-school, youth, & adults
- Facility that supports additional programming offered by alliance organizations

Facility of ~4,000 sq ft that includes:

1. Integration into the natural surroundings
2. Educational programming space - indoor classroom/outdoor pavilion
3. Multi-use, flexible meeting space w/ AV capability
4. Green building features as learning tools (water collection, solar)
5. Office space
6. Serves as ecotourism center
7. Catering kitchen
8. Covered exterior seating area – porch or deck
9. Children's "natural" playground area
10. Pollinator/Native Plant Garden
11. Storage space for educational programming materials
12. Bathrooms accessible
13. Identifying/branding feature

How can you help?

- 1) Complete the online Parks Survey & advocate for an Interpretive Center.
- 2) Attend the May 2nd presentation to the City Council.
- 3) Respond to our upcoming fundraising campaign.
- 4) Volunteer to help with the project.



"In the end, we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught."
Baba Dioum

An Appeal for Parks

by Lonnie Childs

The city of Fredericksburg is re-opening an online survey that allows citizens to provide input to the Parks Master Plan. In an article in the [January newsletter](#), I highlighted some areas of need for our parks system. The facilities that we enjoy are first class in many respects but in my opinion, do not fulfill all the needs of our diverse population.

Following are some areas that I would propose for improving our parks.

1. **Neighborhood Parks**—only 2-3 of our park locations could be considered easily accessible neighborhood parks.
2. **Connectivity**—This was the top suggestion in the first survey. Imagine a hike & bike trail from the town center to LBJ Municipal Park.
3. **Wild Spaces**—FNC and perhaps Cross Mountain are the only nature parks in the immediate area.
4. **Interpretive Center are FNC**—The major focus of our project will be not just to construct a building, but to provide a space for increased educational programming and for organizations dedicated to the preservation of our natural resources to meet and synergize their resources.

This is your opportunity to shape the future of Fredericksburg's parks systems for you, your children and/or grandchildren, as well as all the children to come. Numerous studies have recognized the importance of immersion in nature to boost mental health as well as the dangers to our youth who have increasingly fewer opportunities to experience nature. **Please take the time to advocate for our parks, and if you support the FFNC mission, then please advocate for our proposed Interpretive Center. Take the survey at:**

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FB_Parks_Specific_Survey



Photo by Dot Maginot

**"I feel I am strange to all but the birds of America."
John James Audubon**

Small, Common, but Cute Little Birds



Photo by Dot Maginot

Female Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*

The stare of this female suggests aggravation that we are observing her morning bath.

The female Northern Cardinal is one of the few North American songbird females that sings, often while sitting on the nest, & perhaps to signal the male to bring food to the nest.

Black-crested Titmouse *Baeolophus atricristatus*

A cavity nester which may inhabit your Bluebird house.



Photo by Deb Youngblood

Carolina Wren

Thryothorus ludovicianus

A male and a female may pair bond at any time of the year, staying together for life and remaining together on their territory year-round while foraging and nesting. These cavity nesters love to move into your porch décor if a proper crevice is present.



Photo by Deb Youngblood



“Almost every country tavern has a martin box on the upper part of its sign-board, and I have observed that the handsomer the box, the better does the inn generally prove to be.” John James Audubon

Martins and Monsters

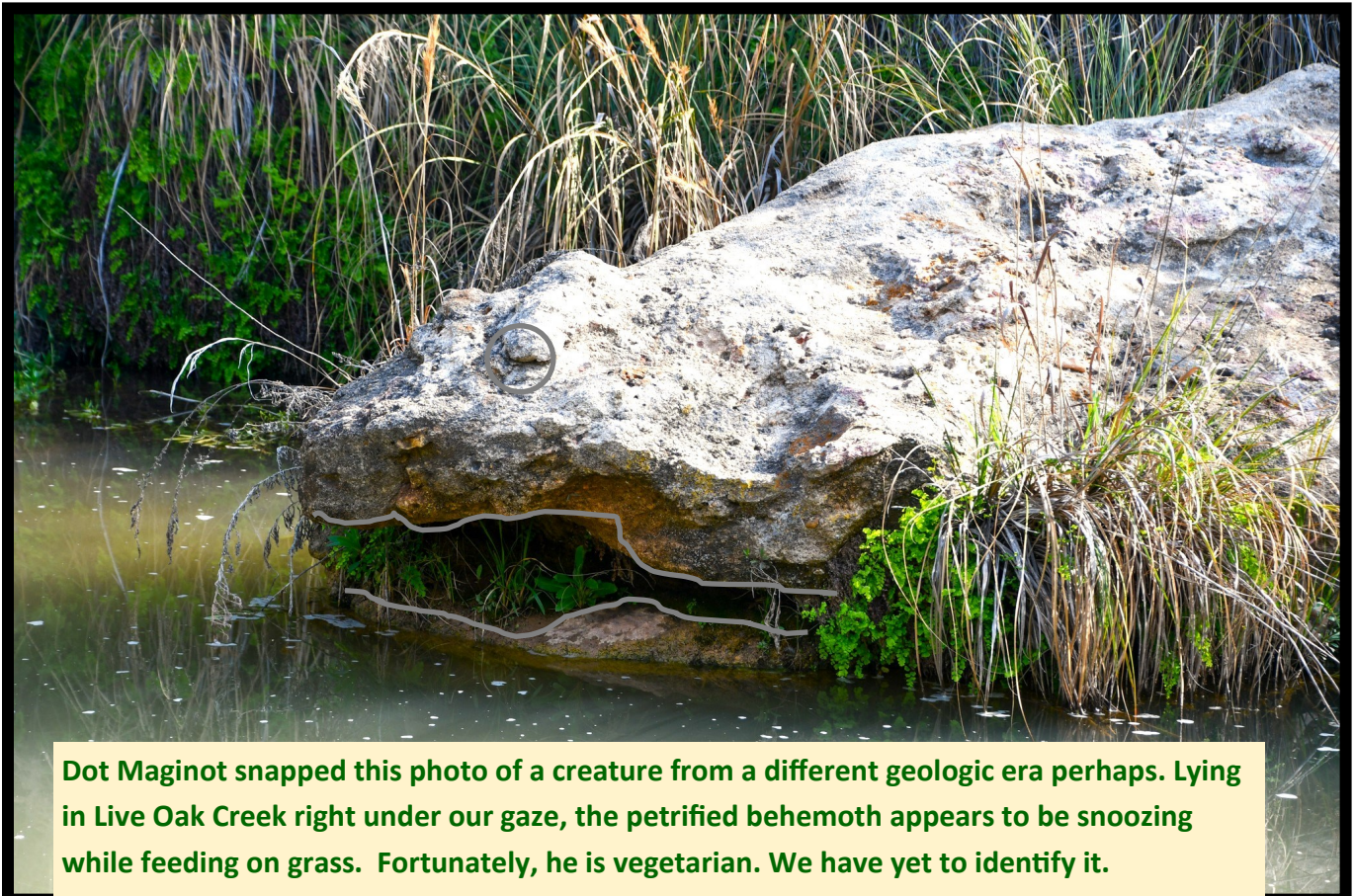


Photo & Video by Lonnie Childs

Purple Martins at FNC

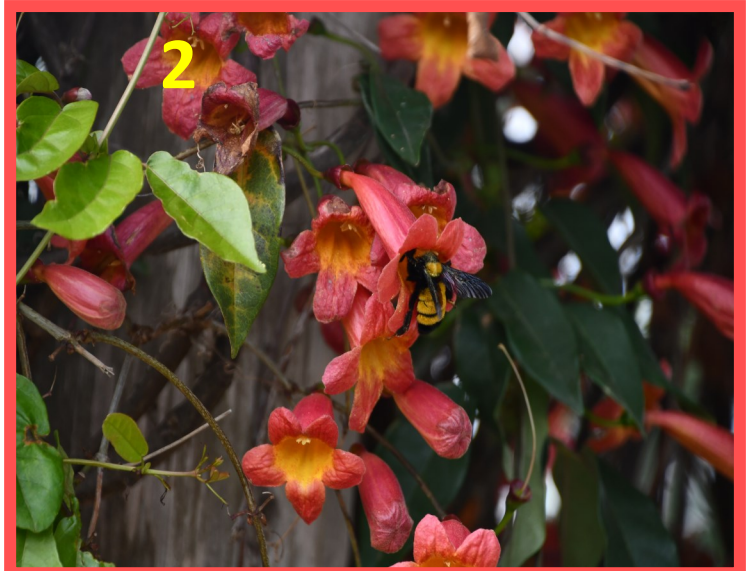
If you have not been to FNC to see and hear the Purple Martins engaged in their daily routine of soaring high only to return to their perches and all the while chattering ““chirp, chortle, rattle, and croak” to their colony cohorts, then you need to do so. Their frenzied routine will entertain and lift the spirits. Following is a link to a preview of what you might see.

<https://youtu.be/hwJaFWiJ4Ds>



Dot Maginot snapped this photo of a creature from a different geologic era perhaps. Lying in Live Oak Creek right under our gaze, the petrified behemoth appears to be snoozing while feeding on grass. Fortunately, he is vegetarian. We have yet to identify it.

Bumblebee Pollen Diving in Crossvine by Dot Maginot





“Conservation means the wise use of the earth and its resources for the lasting good of men.”

Gifford Pinchot

Some Unusual Plants Along the Trail



Manyflower Marsh-pennywort

Hydrocotyle umbellate One of many Water or Floating Pennywort species around the world with some native to the Americas. This one inhabits Texas & the southern US. Many species are considered invasive as they have been introduced to other continents. They are aquatic plants with reported medicinal qualities whose ecological value is providing food for waterfowl & habitat & food for invertebrates which become food sources.



Pennywort near bridge over Live Oak Creek



Star or Twisted Moss *Syntrichia ruralis*

Star Moss is a cosmopolitan species that grows around the globe & in habitats ranging from the Arctic to the desert on all types of soil. Its ecological value lies in stabilizing soil & preventing erosion. Star Moss has evolved the ability to remain dormant for years until conditions allow for its rejuvenation.



"Almost every person, from childhood, has been touched by the untamed beauty of wildflowers."

Lady Bird Johnson

Pink to Purple Wildflowers



Photo by Dot Maginot

Mexican Buckeye *Ugnadia speciosa*

A multi-trunked small tree of 8-12' that can grow to 30'. Its profuse spring blooms resemble peach blossoms while its yellow fall foliage provides interest also. Although not a true buckeye, the resemblance of its poisonous seed yields its common name. It prefers the partial shade of a canyon or hillside.

Prairie Verbena or Dakota Mock Vervain

Glandularia bipinnatifida

This hardy & dependable native thrives in open prairie areas with well-drained soil and sun. It suffers in a garden setting with nutrient rich soil, heavy mulch, or too much watering. It inhabits a broad area from the southwest US to Nicaragua.



Wildflower

Photo by Dot Maginot



Weed?

Photo by Lonnie Childs

Low Verbena or Dwarf Vervain *Glandularia pumila*

This lowly cousin of Prairie Verbena receives the lowest of treatment by gardeners. It is presently experiencing a banner year around the county, as the rain pattern favored its emergence. I venture to say that area gardeners are jerking it up by the fistfalls as I write. Why must it suffer the slings and arrows of human judgment? I suppose its smallness of bloom & aggressive habit of not staying in its place seal its fate to weed status.



“Wildflowers are the loveliest of all because they grow in uncultivated soil, in those hard, rugged places where no one expects them to flourish.”
Micheline Ryckman

White Wildflowers Along the Trail



White or Texas Honeysuckle

Lonicera albiflora

A native honeysuckle with graceful twining branches that reach 4'. This species does not seem to know if it is a vine or shrub. Please do not plant the invasive Japanese Honeysuckle but plant this species or its popular cousin, Coral Honeysuckle, which is a vine. Our native honeysuckle are great nectar & berry sources for wildlife. This species grows along Live Oak Creek.



Dewberry *Rubus trivialis*

This bloom will produce a red turning to black berry which if the birds don't eat it will make tasty cobbler.



Rain Lily *Cooperia pedunculata*

Our spring Rain Lily covers the hillside on the sandstone bluff.

Photos by Lonnie Childs



"Be a cactus in a world of delicate flowers."

Unknown

Feature Story: The Cactus are Blooming!

by Lonnie Childs

The layperson's typical opinion of Cacti probably involves thoughts of prickly plants with little redeeming value that evoke echos of ouch. The prototypical species embedded in their mind because of its prevalence is probably Prickly Pear (*Opuntia sp.*) whose very name condemns it to ostracism. Prickly Pear grows its own bad press as it often overwhelms overgrazed pastures resulting in a prickly hell, or it blocks our passage on a trail in the wild with promises of painful pricks if we fail to navigate sufficiently around it. If you have ever carried home one its spines buried in your flesh or equally worse the tiny enflaming glochids, then perhaps you have earned some cause for a negative outlook of the Cactus family. But please don't revile the whole bunch because of the obstreperous *Opuntias*, who after all only are only fulfilling their evolutionary destiny under favorable conditions created by human activity.

What can motivate you to move past the painful possibilities and reconsider your viewpoint? The Spring Cactus bloom! Their magnificent outbursts of floral color may stop you in your tracks and offer a moment of confused delight. Some of the smaller species often hide in the shadows literally only to reveal themselves with a brilliant bloom. Most Cacti only bloom for a short period and so must create a dazzling visual display to ensure that they attract pollinators. Maybe that display will strike your fancy too.

Some background on Cacti. Cactaceae, the Cactus family, are New World species (with a few exceptions) that probably originated in South America and now include about 1,500-1,600 species according to Dr. Michael Powell, although some estimates suggest 2000+ species. Texas hosts about 136 taxa (95 species and 41 varieties) with about 80% of those living in the Trans-Pecos region of west Texas where the desert environment suits them well. The Edwards Plateau hosts quite a few species, and a few *Opuntias* even inhabit humid east Texas.



Photo by Lonnie Childs

***Opuntia sp.* with Cochineal beetle—the white material is a protective excretion around the beetle. Squeeze it & your fingers will be covered with vermilion dye which has been produced for centuries in Mexico.**

Many people will refer to any plant with spines (ex Agaves, Yuccas) as a Cactus, but they are not. Cactus are characterized by fleshy (succulent), usually leafless stems, with spines arranged in various localized patterns (spine arrangement is an identifying feature) along their stems. The fleshy part of the Cactus, pads on *Opuntias*, are modified stems which also evolved to host chlorophyll and the cells where photosynthesis occurs. These succulent stems have evolved as reservoirs for fluid storage to sustain them through the low rainfall



"A cactus is a desert's rose."

-Matshona Dhlwayo

Feature Story: The Cactus are Blooming!

climate of the desert environs—Nature's version of a water collection system.

Cacti typically inhabit thin, rocky soils or soil filled crevices on south or west exposures which reduces the possibility of other competing vegetation. Some favor igneous versus sedimentary bases soils. Although they can tolerate full sun as an adult, seedlings and juveniles will have higher success rates if they grow in the dappled shade of a nurse plant—either their mother plant or another species such as a shrub.

The leaves on Cactus are largely non-existent (young *Opuntia* leaves will have small temporary leaves) and have evolved to become spines. Unique to Cactus, they have Areoles which are the growth zone around which flowers, spines, or new stems emerge. They are most visible on *Opuntias* as fuzzy little dots which are covered with tiny spines called glochids, so don't touch! Leaves can be counter-productive in a desert climate in that they are prone to losing moisture.

Given their prickly nature, the question arises amongst we humans as to the ecological value of this family. There are varieties of *Opuntias* whose pads provide a vital food source to deer, javelina, and other small mammals, as well as indigenous human cultures. The flowers increase their ecological contribution as a pollen source to insects (check out the orgiastic pollen gathering by insects inside a Prickly Pear bloom). Finally, Cactus fruits provide an important food source for birds and small mammals and indigenous peoples.

Conservation. Due to their unique characteristics and limited geographic distribution, Cactus are prized around the world by collectors who oftentimes will pay large sums for rare species. As a result, illegal harvesting or legal overharvesting is prevalent, even in our national parks, despite federal and international laws. You can help by only judiciously harvesting Cactus with the landowner's permission and only buying Cactus that have been grown legally at responsible nurseries. These prickly plants deserve just as much protection and respect as any other species, and many are already endangered or threatened due to their limited populations.

Here are some Common Edward's Plateau Cacti.

Lace Cactus (*Echinocereus reichenbachii*) is one of the most common cactus in Texas with its distribution stretching from south Texas to the Panhandle and beyond. It features single or solitary cylindrical stems reaching 4-5 inches tall with vertical ribs that host an intricate array of generally white spines that are attractive and provide its name. This species does equally well in thin limestone soils or igneous soils at Enchanted



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Texas Rainbow Cactus

Echinocereus dasycanthus

Note the intricate spine pattern. Spines are defensive but also provide shade & capture humidity.

Feature Story: The Cactus are Blooming!

Rock. You may miss it on the trail until its magenta bloom bursts out in spectacular fashion. There are many varieties of this species including one with black spines.



Lace Cactus



Photos by Lonnie Childs



Photo by Lonnie Childs

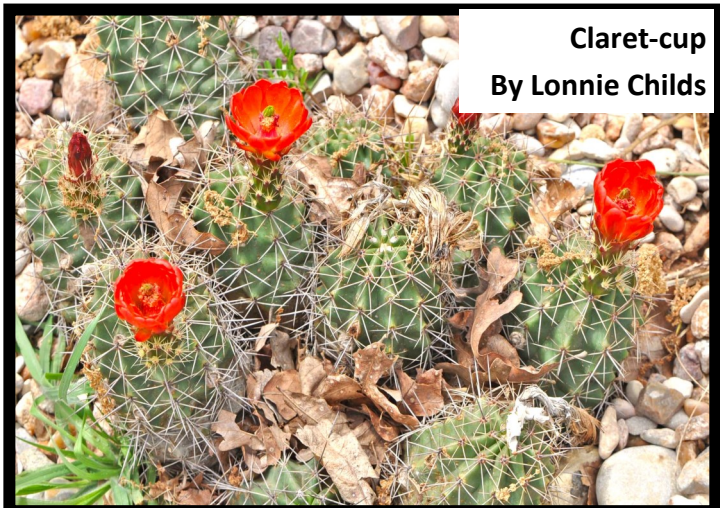
Grooved Nipple Cactus

Grooved Nipple Cactus (*Coryphanta sulcata*) grows in clumps that can be 12" in diameter with dozens of stems of varying size. It also has a widespread distribution across the Edward's Plateau and the Blackland Prairie to north Texas. Nipple Cactus derives its name from the red globose fruits that appear after flowering. It also camouflages itself well along the sandstone bluff at FNC until its pale yellow flower with maroon center suddenly erupts.

Claret-cup or Hedgehog Cactus (*Echinocereus triglochidiatus*) represents a mounding cactus with a few to many stems of varying shapes and sizes up to 4" in diameter and 10" tall. Their distribution ranges from the Edward's Plateau west to California and



Photo by Dot Maginot



Claret-cup
By Lonnie Childs



"I bought a cactus. A week later it died. And I got depressed, because I thought, Damn. I am less nurturing than a desert."

Demetri Martin

Feature Story: The Cactus are Blooming!

south into Mexico. In our area, it grows in well-draining sandy, gravelly soils in dry woodland habitat. Claret-cup feature gorgeous blossoms of said shape that vary from red to orange.



Claret-cup by Lonnie Childs



Horse-crippler by Lonnie Childs

Horse Crippler aka Devil's Head (*Echinocactus texensis*) appears as a flat-topped, hemispheric stem from 4-12" in diameter mostly buried in limestone soil. It sports nasty spines located along 13 spines that can be injurious to step on as the cactus is not easily visible. Horse-crippler

produces a smaller pinl-salmon flower with red center that yields small crimson fruits.

Texas Prickly Pear *Opuntia engelmannii* var. *lindheimeri* is our ubiquitous species throughout south central Texas. The *Opuntia* genus is quite complex because of its tendency to hybridize and its diversity with ~200 species. While this spiny pariah is largely avoided, take a peak into one of its yellow blossoms, and you will find a variety of insects rolling around in a bowl of buttery pollen. It really is quite the show and worth a gander. Our low sprawling *Opuntia* that you find in pastures hiding amongst the grasses is Plains Prickly Pear with the maroon lined flowers as a tell.



Plains Prickly Pear by Lonnie Childs



"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world."

John Muir

Thanks for your support!



Frogfruit by Lonnie Childs

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

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Lonnie Childs, Newsletter Editor, at lonniechilds@utexas.edu