

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

November, 2023 Volume 4 Number 11

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

We continue to move forward with our Interpretive Center project and will soon interview potential building contractors to assist with pre-construction services during the design phase. Although we had optimistically hoped to have renderings and concept drawings in the near future to give you a picture of our project, we worked with SKT Architects to create a detailed schedule of the activities and potential development review meetings with city officials necessary to complete the drawings. The realistic answer is that it will likely be in the spring timeframe before we can give you the big picture so to speak, so please stay tuned.

One of the goals for the Interpretive Center is to provide a venue for like-minded nature organizations to also offer nature programs in synergy with our efforts. I would like to highlight two existing organizations with whom we currently have valued partnerships—the Hill Country Master Naturalists and the Fredericksburg chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT). Most of our volunteer corps have earned the Master Naturalist certification and meet their annual service hour requirement by working on projects at FNC. We could not function successfully without their dedicated labor and support. Our local NPSOT chapter, champions of our native plants and habitats, exemplifies another great alliance organization. They recently donated \$1500 to FFNC which enabled us to complete our deer excluding fence around the Pollinator Garden and preserve our native plant demonstration garden. Many thanks and kudos to these two great partners who share our mission to educate people about and preserve our Hill Country natural treasures.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

In this Issue:

- FFNC Volunteers at Work
- Journaling Workshop News
- Visitors to FNC
- Observations Along the Trail & Lake
- Wintering Ospreys at FNC
- Blumen & Buzzin' at the Garten
- Feature Story: Our American Marsupial
- Recognition of our Donors

Note: No newsletter in December.

We'll be back in January, 2024!



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—Happy Volunteers on Fun Tuesday



Gracie Waggener instructs **Frank Garcia, Nancy Person, and Mark Moldrawski** in planting Antelope Horn milkweeds (*Asclepias Asperula*) in the Butterfly Bench Meadow. As you walk by, look for the pink flags marking the seedlings. This milkweed is a favorite host plant on which the spring migrating Monarchs will lay eggs. Thanks to Monarch Watch for the donation of the plants. <https://monarchwatch.org/>

Frank Garcia, Gordon Downey, Mark Moldrawski, & Dennis Thiele install a new rock & gravel path to the Pollinator Garden designed to integrate with the creek drainage & correct an erosion issue.



Photos by Lonnie Childs

Fun Tuesdays at FNC

Volunteer!

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 **Tuesdays at 8:30am**.

Contact **Gracie Waggener** at gwaggener@flow-apps.com to receive a weekly email notification



"We do not see nature with our eyes, but with our understandings and our hearts."
William Hazlett

Nature Journaling is Good for the Soul!

Photos from our October workshop on Nature Journaling.



Instructor Nancy Huffman addresses the class.



Attendees check out sample materials.

Photos by
Deb Youngblood



A student adeptly draws a Gaillardia?



Laura Grant shows that nature journaling elevates your mood.



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

Henry David Thoreau

A Salute to our Visitors to FNC

Hill Country Master Naturalist Class of 2023 Visits

On November 11th, the HCMN class of 2023 held their final field trip of the year at FNC. We hosted approximately 40 students & class officers for guided hikes led by Trudy Eberhardt, Billy Guin, & Lonnie Childs & a tour of the Pollinator Garden hosted by Gracie Waggener. Most of our volunteer corps consists of Master Naturalists, & from the 2023 class, we are thrilled to have **Gordon Downey, Mark Moldrawski, Barbara Romano, & Denise & Dennis Thiele** volunteering at FNC. Welcome & Thanks!!



Master Naturalists hear the story of the Pollinator Garden told by head gardener, Gracie Waggener.

RV Park Visitors



Heather Salinas & Olive

FNC hosted over 8500 visitors in 2022 with about 2/3 of them not residing in Fredericksburg. Visitors to the nearby RV Park comprise many of those out of town visitors.

Heather Salinas recently submitted this photo of she & her companion, Olive, who are frequent visitors to Fredericksburg & the RV park.

Heather wrote, "The trails were amazing as always and the pollinator garden always brings me so much joy! I look forward to every visit and appreciate all you and your team do to share your love of nature with so many visitors!"

Thanks for the kind words, Heather! Our volunteers enjoy the feedback.

We love to hear from our visitors. Send us your selfie at FNC, & we'll salute you.



"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."

Marcel Proust

A Salute to our Visitors to FNC



Center Point Garden Club Visits FNC

On October 17th, eleven members of the Center Point Garden Club visited FNC for a guided hike of the trail & tour of the Pollinator Garden. Joey Lynch, CPGC member, wrote. *"Thank you so much for the educational and enjoyable tour of the nature center. We all are so impressed by the trails, the vision and foresight your group has provided for so many to enjoy and learn from. ...Thank you again: this may be one of the best field trips our group has participated in."*



Photos by Joey Lynch



"When eating fruit, remember the one who planted the tree."
Vietnamese Proverb

The Buffet at the Pollinator Garden has Closed!



Photo by Lonnie Childs

In early 2023, we appealed to our supporters to help us fund a fence to exclude the deer from the Pollinator Garden. We had suffered their ravages for many years, but the drought over the last two years had driven them to new levels of damage including moving in to bed down at night. We love our deer and sympathize with their plight, but needed to make the PG off limits for its health and survival. The new fence was finally completed in October. Take a look—function in a beautiful rustic appearance.

Thanks to the following generous donors for supporting this accomplishment!

Susan & Errol Candy

Jennifer & Gregory Carmack

Valarie & Lonnie Childs

Carol Knutson

Vickie & Carl Luckenbach

Kelly & Tom Musselman

Susan Rust

Rebecca Taylor

Mary Walsh

Siquentis Foundation—Jodi & Darrell TrTee

Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) - Fredericksburg Chapter

Observations Along the Trail



The sparse fall rains stimulated a few hardy species to bloom along the trails recently.

Above: Red or Tropical Sage (*Salvia coccinea*) grows in the sandy soils of Post Oak Savannas across the south & tolerates part shade. This hummingbird nectar plant is very deer resistant.

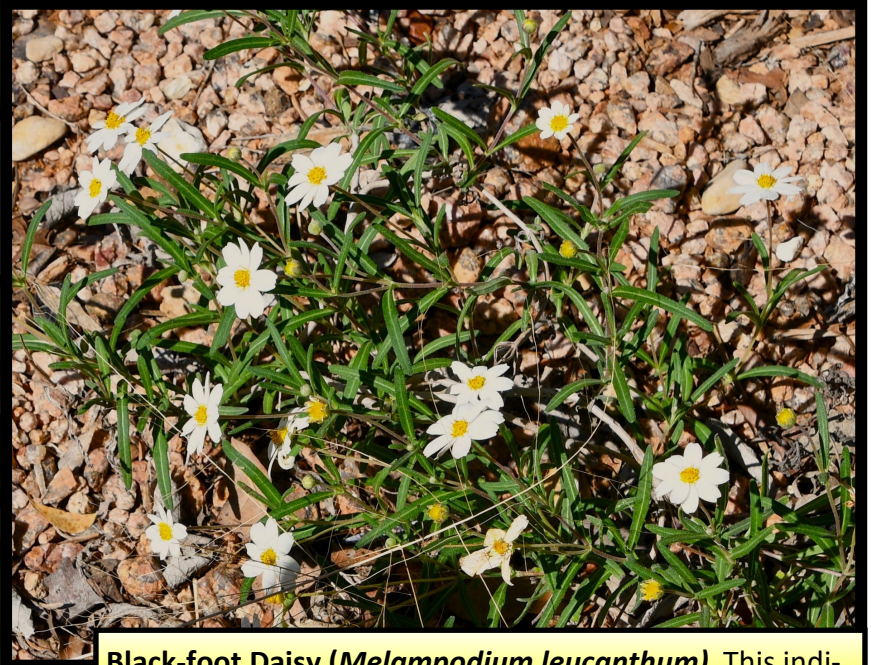
Above right: Maximilian Sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliani*) A native prairie perennial, this sunflower is a desirable range & wildlife plant.

Right: Curlycup Gumweed (*Grindelia squarrosa*) Our varietal has no ray flowers with the typical "gummy" disc flowers.

Observations Along the Trail



Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) This showy bloom appears along creeks & wetlands growing in moist to wet, humus-rich soil. It regularly grows as a solitary red sentinel in the sand bars near the fern grotto on Live Oak Creek, punctuating the Irish green of the wall of Maidenhair Fern.



Black-foot Daisy (*Melampodium leucanthum*) This individual was planted in the Cactus Garden & is extremely heat & drought tolerant but needs well-drained soil. Why is it called "black-foot", as even the Latin name suggests? This refers to the color of the base of the stem and roots. A tough little plant—just leave it alone after planting.



Carolina Snailseed (*Cocculus carolinus*) A climbing vine that spreads vigorously. The fruit bestows good bird food.

Photos by
Dot Maginot

Observations Along the Lake

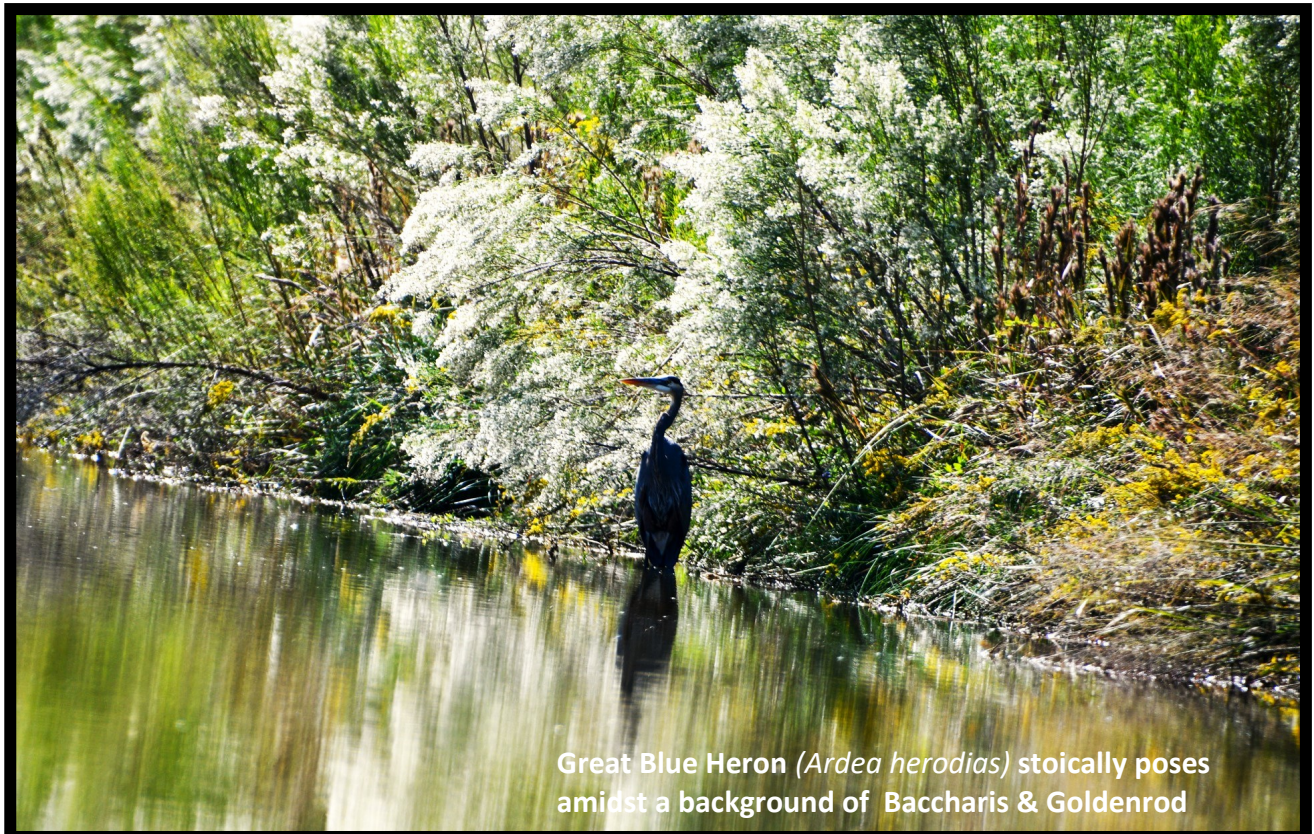


Red-eared Sliders

Trachemys scripta elegans

This commonly traded reptile has made the list of the "world's 100 most invasive species".

Photos by Dot Maginot



Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) stoically poses amidst a background of Baccharis & Goldenrod

Our Wintering Ospreys



Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) We are fortunate to have a pair of Osprey spend winters with us along Live Oak Creek. They are one of only 6 land bird species that can be found on every continent besides Antarctica. In North America, they breed in summer habitat in the northern Rockies, Canada, & along the eastern US. We are on the northern edge of their winter range.

Let's go fishing! Osprey have evolutionary adaptations which make them superb fishers with fish comprising 99% of their diet. They fly with stiff wingbeats in a steady, rowing motion that is recognizable. They can spy fish underwater from as high as 131', at which point they may hover a bit before diving into the water to seize the unsuspecting prey. It is a sight to see! Look for them in the lake area above the dam.



Blumen and Buzzin' at the Garten



Shrubby or White Boneset (*Ageratina havanense*) is a stupendous fall bloomer & one to have in your garden for the migrating Monarchs & as an attractant for our underappreciated native bees. This species not only provides a spectacular floral display but also offers the pleasant buzz of nectar engorging bees.

Photos by Lonnie Childs

Western Honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) harvesting some nectar or pollen to take back to the hive.



Photo by Dot Maginot



[On seeing the marsupials in Australia for the first time and comparing them to placental mammals:] “An unbeliever ... might exclaim “Surely two distinct Creators must have been at work.”
Charles Darwin

Our American Marsupial by Lonnie Childs

Let’s start out with a little quiz to test your knowledge of the Didelphimorphians. What? What marsupial lives north of Mexico and inhabits the northernmost geography in the world for a marsupial? What animal goes on a honeymoon and thirteen days later delivers a baby? In southern US cuisine, what tasty mammal goes best with sweet potatoes (hint: not a racoon, although I hear that it is a close second)? Finally, what small mammal when threatened, pretends to be dead, otherwise known as playing _____? I can’t make it any easier. I am talking about a possum or opossum, depending on your linguistic preference.

The word *opassum* was first recorded by John Smith of Jamestown fame in 1607-1611 as the word used by the local Powhatan tribe for the small, whitish mammal that reportedly tasted like a pig. Today, the term is used to describe not just our resident Virginia possum but other species that are classified in the *Didelphimorphia* order. The Virginia possum’s Latin name is *Didelphis virginiana*—*Didelphis* referring to its two wombs (the reproductive womb + the nursing pouch), and the species name pays tribute to the location of its early sighting by the English, although Spaniards had discovered it in South America in even earlier in Columbian times.



What is a marsupial, and don’t they only live in Australia? Marsupials are a class of mammals who share the chief characteristic of birthing premature newborns who then mature in a nursing pouch and include such iconic species as the kangaroo, koala, Tasmanian devil, and our Virginia possum—very high company for our lowly, disrespected species. The nursing pouch plus their simpler, less developed brains distinguish them from the placental mammals. To your surprise probably, marsupials actually evolved in the Amazon basin of South America during a period of geologic time when South America was geographically isolated from any other land mass, thus allowing for some unique evolutionary pathways. When the supercontinent of Gondwana (South America, Antarctica, and Australia) broke up, many of the marsupials went with the Australian landmass, but some remained in South America.

Moving north. Today, 70% of marsupials inhabit Australia while 30% of the order reside in South and Central America with only the possum living in North America. The **Great American Biotic Interchange (GABI)** allowed for the movement north 2.7mya as the land bridge across the isthmus of Panama arose. Possums



"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, not the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."
Charles Darwin

Our American Marsupial by Lonnie Childs

crossed the isthmus about .8mya followed by porcupines and armadillos in modern times. The geographic range of possums in North America has been gradually spreading north with warmer weather patterns. Possums may be slow and lumbering in their movements, but they have proven steady and persistent in their migratory drive to survive.

Tree huggers who eat anything. Possums inhabit mainly semi-arboreal environments but can also be found on the ground as they scavenge for food and water. Their semi-opposable thumb evolved to allow them to better grasp and hang from tree limbs which is safer than slow walking across the forest floor. Their widely omnivorous diet insures the availability of food, although insects offer their preferential choice, and as a benefit to us and other mammals, they consume copious numbers of ticks when available. And of course, human garbage and bowls of pet food seem to be real attractants that stimulate a possum to famously grin. Reportedly, the size (obesity?) of urban possums is increasing as they adopt our western diet.

Many babies, many losses. Possums only live an average of about two years in the wild, which might explain their high birthrates. Females breed ten months of the year, and after only a 13 day gestation period, can deliver 1-3 litters yearly with an average size of 8-9 infants and as many as 20. The honeybee sized newborn crawl from the birth canal to the nursing pouch where they latch onto one of thirteen teats for 2 months. After 2.5 months, they crawl out of the pouch and onto the mother's back where they remain for 4-5 months and learn survival skills. Possum mothers deserve an award for their physically challenging maternal support. All of these valiant efforts by the mother perhaps evolved to compensate for the sad math that only 10% of newborn will survive to reproductive age. They have developed one other survival defense in that they have a low susceptibility to rabies due to their lower body temperatures.



Playing possum. Of course, this defensive posture has perhaps made them famous. When you move as slow as a possum, you need to develop some tricks. When confronted, they may flee or hold their ground and attempt to appear menacing by opening their mouth to show their 50 teeth, hiss, drool, and puff their fur to



*"Grinning like a possum eating a sweet potato."
Old Southern Expression*

Our American Marsupial by Lonnie Childs

look bigger. If that does not succeed, then they will reflexively fall into a limp and motionless posture on their side with mouth and eyes open while their tongue dangles out. For a grand finale, the possum may release a green fluid from its anus with a putrid odor that repels predators. Their heart rate drops by 50%, and their breathing rate drops so slow and shallow it is hardly detectable. Possums may continue in this position for several hours until the predator is hopefully repelled or declines to eat seemingly dead fare.



A love-hate relationship. Humans and possums share a long cultural and folkloric history together. Into the 20th century, possums were important game animals and served as the main ingredient in "possum pie" and other mainly southern dishes. They made appearances in music, minstrel shows, and even the cartoon, *Pogo*. By the 1960's, we laughed as the possum-eating "Beverly Hillbillies" staged "Possum Day."

In current times, the reputation of possums has slid largely into disgust and repulsion (i.e. giant rats!), mostly by urban dwellers who encounter them at their trash cans or pet food bowls and not in their wild environment. You can eliminate these encounters by using tamper-proof trash cans or protecting the food bowl. If you encounter one, the best option is just to leave them alone, and hope they depart. You won't find a more docile intruder. If needed, there are simple ideas on the internet for trapping and moving them.

Nature's News of the Weird

"A Starfish 'Body' Is Just One Giant Head"

Read all about it. Right Click [HERE](#) & Open Link



"We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."

Winston Churchill

**MANY THANKS TO OUR DONORS to the
BILL LINDEMANN CAPITAL FUND in 2023**

These funds will be used in support of our Interpretive Center project.

Anonymous

Linda White

Liz Althaus

Lonnie & Valarie Childs

Joseph Financial

Billy Guin

Tim Lehmborg

Carl & Vickie Luckenbach

Steve & Jana Neale

Thanks for your Generosity!

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!**

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**