

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

February, 2024 Volume 5 Number 2

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

We are moving rapidly into 2024 having completed our Strategic Planning and Budgeting processes. Our plans focus on increasing membership and our operational revenue stream so that we can accomplish more improvements at FNC such as the installation of new handrails along the trails and an increase in our educational offerings. All of which brings me to one more reminder that our ability to succeed is based on your memberships, donations, and volunteerism. Please consider joining our organization.

We have some changes with our Board membership with Tom Musselman stepping down. We wish to thank him for his dedicated service and guidance. We welcome Trudy Eberhardt and Sandi Kennedy to the Board. Both are dedicated volunteers in the area who have contributed to FFNC and several other nature organizations over the years, and their elevated participation with FfNC is most welcome.

Our Interpretive Center project moves forward with several major milestones achieved in the past month. We have contracted with Guido Construction of San Antonio/Fredericksburg to provide pre-construction services during design and to be our general contractor. Additionally, we have engaged Scott Clarke of Clarke Designs/Varrobook to design and install exhibits at the facility. We recently conducted a brainstorming session with Scott and generated many exciting ideas for both interior and exterior exhibits. Finally, our Advisory Committee recently held the first preview of a conceptual design and master plan of the facility developed by Brandon Weinheimer of SKT Architects and Dunaway. The plan was well received by the Committee and will be released to the public after City Council approval in the near future.

In the meantime, go check out all the Bluebonnet rosettes ready to bloom in the coming month. With a few more rains, a great wildflower season is in the offing.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

In this Issue:

- FFNC Volunteer Activity
- Cemetery Birding Workshop
- Feature Story: *The Lost Hickories of the Hill Country*
- What's this Bill? The Pileated Woodpecker





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 Announcements

Fun Tuesdays at FNC

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 9:00am. During the winter months, the Garden Crew will suspend until further notice. The Trail Crew works each Tuesday as weather allows.

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



Other Volunteer Opportunities that don't require physical labor:

- **Newsletter**—write articles, editing and production
- **Website**—content management, website maintenance
- **Membership management**
- **Programs**

For more information about these opportunities, contact Lonnie Childs @ lonniechilds@utexas.edu



Many thanks to ***Friendly Native Nurseries of Fredericksburg*** for the donation of a Mexican Buckeye tree to add to our understory in the Bird Blind area.
Support your local nursery!

Mexican Buckeye *Ugnadia speciosa*
Photo by Joseph A Marcus



Stairway to Live Oak Creek Gets a Handrail!



We have a new handrail installed at the steps descending to the creek!
The walk down to the creek will be accessible to more hikers and safer for all.
This was made possible by a \$2,000 grant from an Anonymous donor.



"An owl is the wisest of all birds because the more it sees the less it talks."

Christie Watson

Eastern Screech Owl Workshop Was Trilling!

Speaker Mike Mitchell



Photo by Patti Guin

Thanks to **Wild Birds Unlimited of Kerrville** for the donation of a Screech Owl box!



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Approx. 94 people attended our Eastern Screech Owl workshop where retired TPWD game warden, Mike Mitchell educated them on the habits of these fascinating predators & how to install a nesting box. The audience was also treated to his videos of owls in action.



Photo by Wolfgang Wand

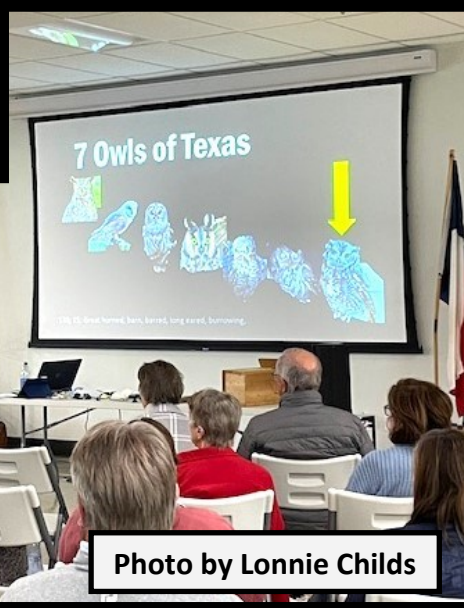


Photo by Lonnie Childs

Billy Guin demos box assembly

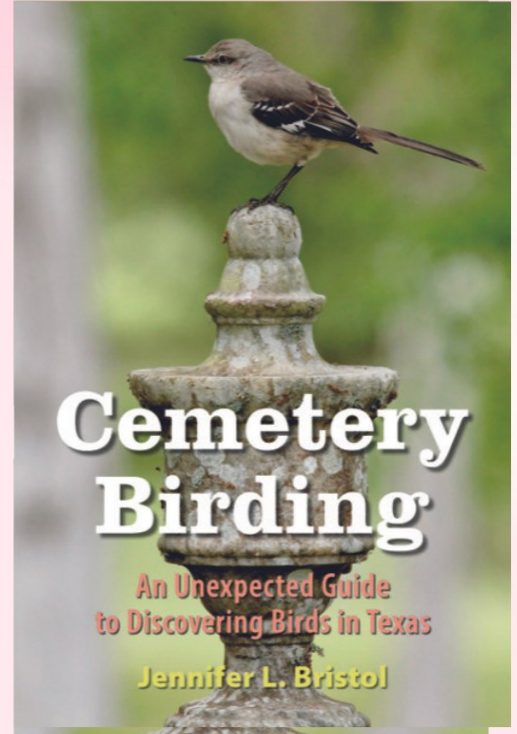


Photo by Patti Guin

Discovering Birds in Unlikely Places!

It might seem unlikely that a place designed for the departed could be teeming with life. Cemeteries have a long history of serving the dual purpose of honoring the deceased while also providing a space for the living to gather and grieve in the embrace of nature. Touted as some of the earliest public parks in the country -- with mature trees, open grasslands, meadows of wildflowers -- cemeteries are also attractive to birds and wildlife. In an age of distractions and disconnection, cemeteries create a sense of place where visitors can reconnect with nature while exploring the cultural history of a region. For bird watchers, cemeteries offer easy walking, open spaces to peer into habitats, and a peaceful place to feel the breeze and listen to the quiet conversations of nature.

From Beaumont to Amarillo and beyond, the cemeteries of Texas are alive with the sound of birdsong, and the FFNC invite you to join us and author Jennifer Bristol as she takes us on a birding journey that combines an extraordinary blend of Texas history and culture as well as tips and advice on what birds can be seasonally observed while treading carefully and ethically when exploring these sacred spaces.



“Cemetery Birding”

A Nature Series Workshop Sponsored by the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

Presenter: Jennifer L. Bristol

Saturday, March 16, 2024 - 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.

AgriLife Extension Office - Fredericksburg*

****(Following the presentation, there will be a Book Signing and optional field trip to Greenwood Cemetery in Fredericksburg. Field trip limited to the first 30 people who register).***

To register, contact Gracie Waggener at gwaggener@flow-apps.com

Approved for a total of Three (3) Hours of TMN AT Credit: Presentation 2 and Cemetery Walk 1.



JENNIFER L. BRISTOL is the former director of the Texas Children in Nature Program at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Bristol is the 2018 and 2019 recipient of the Most Valuable Birder in the Great Texas Birding Classic and she guides walks for Travis Audubon. In addition to *Cemetery Birding*, she is also the author of *Parking Lot Birding: A Fun Guide to Discovering Birds in Texas* and is a contributor to *Texas State Parks the First 100 Years 1923-2023*. She resides in Austin, Texas.



"The river is such a tranquil place, a place to sit and think of romance and the beauty of nature. Enjoy the elegance of swans and the chance of a glimpse of a kingfisher." Jane Wilson-Howarth

Our Belted Kingfisher Shows His Pluck



After grooming his spiked 'doo and straightening his white collar, he's off forth on a swing, skating on air down the creek, searching for prey, and announcing himself to all with a piercing rattle, including any potential interlopers. Even though his handsome style speaks for itself, he seems condemned to announce himself.



Photos by
Dot Maginot



"Time in nature is not leisure time; it's an essential investment in our children's health (and also, by the way, in our own)."

Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*

Advocate for our Parks!



An empty snail shell lies nestled in

Star or Twisted Moss (*Syntrichia ruralis*)

This hardy moss inhabits a broad array of habitats, elevations, levels of sunlight, and climates globally. While tolerating a variety of soils, it prefers calcareous soil. This resilient species can dry out and become dormant for many years and then return to active metabolism again after many decades of desiccation. Star Moss contributes ecologically by stabilizing soil and preventing erosion. It can be found along the Live Oak Wilderness Trail near the dam performing that stabilizing function on a soil embankment.

Photo by Lonnie Childs

Speak Up for Our Parks - Last Call!

While Fredericksburg is surrounded by the picturesque Hill Country, our town has not been blessed by the set aside of adequate park lands. In the draft Parks Master Plan, citizens clearly stated that we had inadequate neighborhood parks and no inter-connectivity. They asked for more trails and advocated for partnerships to promote more park space (*i.e.* FFNC). You have one last chance to offer your opinion about Fredericksburg park needs. I would argue that we also need more **green space** (*i.e.* undeveloped wilderness space), and if you are so inclined, please advocate for our future **Interpretive Center** as a valued addition to our parks system.

To read the Parks Master Plan, Right Click & Open Link [Parks Master Plan Update](#)

To provide input to the Parks Plan, Right Click & Open Link [Parks Master Plan Survey](#)



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

Become an iNaturalist

2024 Bioblitz at FNC

in conjunction with City Nature Challenge—San Antonio Area

Save the Date: Friday, April 26, 2024

Look for details in future newsletters.

"City Nature Challenge is an annual, global event that encourages people in cities around the world to observe and document the biodiversity present in their urban environments using iNaturalist." Learn more at <https://cnc-sa.org/>

At FNC, we will hike the trails & gardens to view, identify, & record species using the iNaturalist application. This is a great opportunity to learn to use this amazing tool. Learn more about it at <https://cnc-sa.org/learn/>

Nature's News of the Weird



***Brood X is coming! Hint: They've been waiting for 17 years.
Read all about it. Right Click [HERE](#) & Open Link***



"The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit."

Nelson Henderson

The Lost Hickories of the Hill Country

by Lonnie Childs

Bastrop has its Lost Pines, and the Hill Country has its Lost Hickories, at least that's what I'm calling them. If you look at the distribution map for the Black Hickory tree, you will see that it grows in a wide swatch of east Texas running north to south and roughly corresponding to the Post Oak Savannah ecoregion. Scan west to the Hill Country about 100 miles, and you will find incidences of the tree in both Gillespie and Llano counties, which elicits at least two questions.

First, what do these two regions have in common? Black Hickories prefer sandy/rocky soils that are thinner but well-drained and can often be found on eroded hillsides such as might be found in a Post Oak Savannah. Surprisingly, pockets of this habitat type can be found in Gillespie County.

I live in the historical alluvial flood plain of the Pedernales River east of Fredericksburg, and the habitat is Post Oak Savannah with 2-3 feet of sandy loam. We have a good population of Black Hickories existing amongst larger populations of Post Oaks and Black-Jack Oaks with

which this species of Hickory is often found in association. Further north near Enchanted Rock and into Llano County, the granitic sandy soils are also favorable for the tree. Finally, Black Hickory can tolerate rainfall totals of 26-52 inches annually which exactly fits the rainfall range from east Texas to Gillespie County. However, I have noticed that our recent drought periods seem to be taking a toll on the local Hickories. Thus, the answer to the original question is that the similar soil types across both regions combined with barely adequate rainfall across the geography allows the tree to grow in both regions despite the geographical gap of 100 miles.



Photo by Lonnie Childs

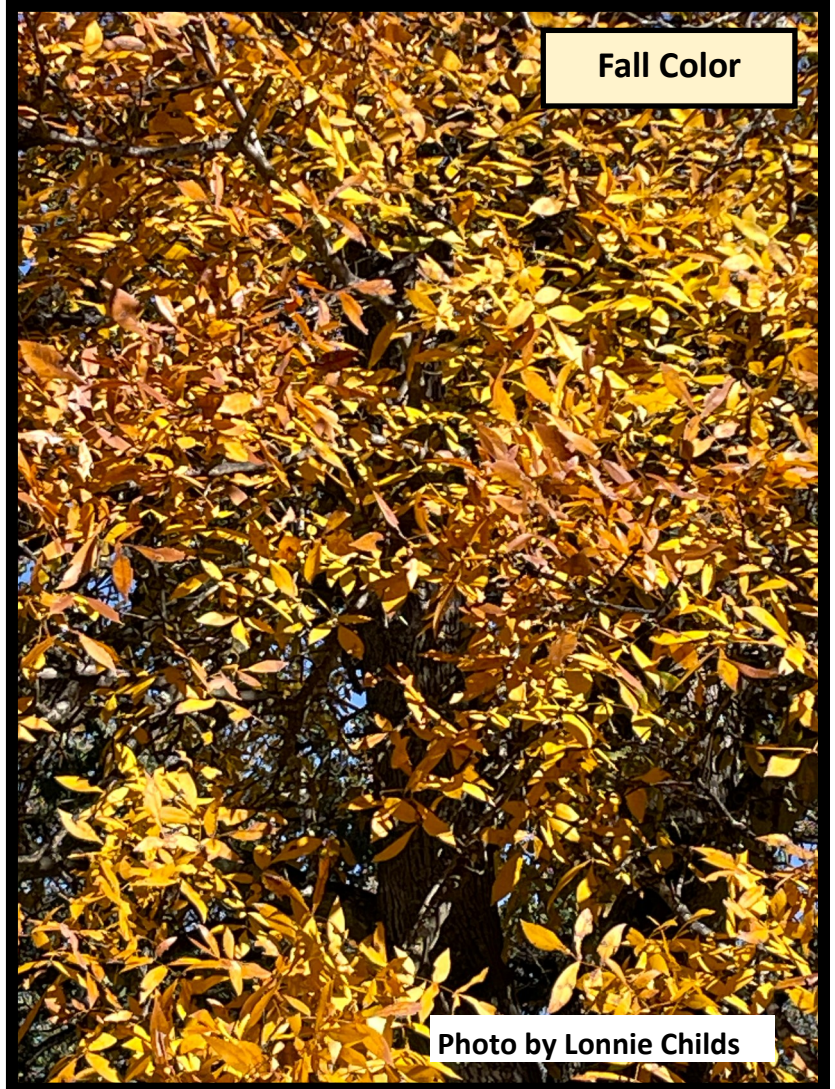


"I feel a great regard for trees; they represent age and beauty and the miracles of life and growth."

Louise Dickinson Rich

The Lost Hickories of the Hill Country

Now for the second question; **Why is there a large discontinuity in the distribution of Black Hickories?** This one is harder to answer. I can only speculate, since I found no scientific commentary on the subject. One might initially guess that the Hickories could be relict plants that survived from a broader distribution in earlier, cooler times such as the Ice Ages but whose distribution has now receded with the warming times, thus creating the geographic gap. The rebuttal to that is that there is very little suitable habitat with the correct soil type between here and its nearest habitat east of the Blackland Prairie. My guess is that the tree first evolved in its larger eastern distribution and subsequently migrated west but who knows how. Their nuts have a very hard shell which is tough to crack and argues against some sort of animal being the vector for migration to the Hill Country. Black Hickories are the westernmost of the Hickories except for the Pecans. I suppose that we will just have to let the mystery be for now.



Black Hickories (*Carya texana*), aka Texas or Buckley's Hickory, share the same genus with Pecans and are part of the Walnut (*Juglandaceae*) family. We are at its westernmost distribution as it grows east of here throughout the southern US.

They are a well-shaped hardwood tree growing to 40 feet in our area and as much as 140 feet in east Texas bottomlands. Their alternate, compound leaves are 8" to 12" long, with 5 to 7 leaflets. The leaflets are 3" to 5" long and 2" wide, dark green and lustrous above, and pale yellow-green beneath. The nut fruits are hard and often not appetizing to the human palate. The vegetation can provide attractive fall color in hues of vibrant yellow.



"Trees exhale for us so that we can inhale them to stay alive. Can we ever forget that? Let us love trees with every breath we take until we perish."
Munia Kha

The Lost Hickories of the Hill Country

Black Hickories were probably never an important human or animal food source because of the hard shell and the abundant availability of pecans in the same geographical area. It was primarily used by humans as a valued firewood because the hardwood burned hot and long. Black Hickories do serve as a primary host for some magnificent moths, including the Luna, Funeral Dagger, and Giant Regal as well as the Banded Hairstreak butterfly.

If you hike Sandy Creek at Enchanted Rock, you will find some fine examples of Black Hickory along the trail. If you are lucky enough to have some Black Hickories on your property, treasure and protect them, since they are not ubiquitous and are a very attractive and unique shade tree. You can brag to your friends that you have one of the Lost Hickories of the Hill Country.



"Dead skunk in the middle of the road, stinking to high heaven."

Dead Skunk by Loudon Wainwright III

You might be wondering why all the dead skunks litter our highways of late. It's mating season from February thru March, so the males are mindlessly in love as they cross the highway oblivious to their high stakes pursuit. Here are three of the five Texas skunks, all found in Gillespie County.



Guess
who?



What's That Bill?



Pileated Woodpecker

Dryocopus pileatus

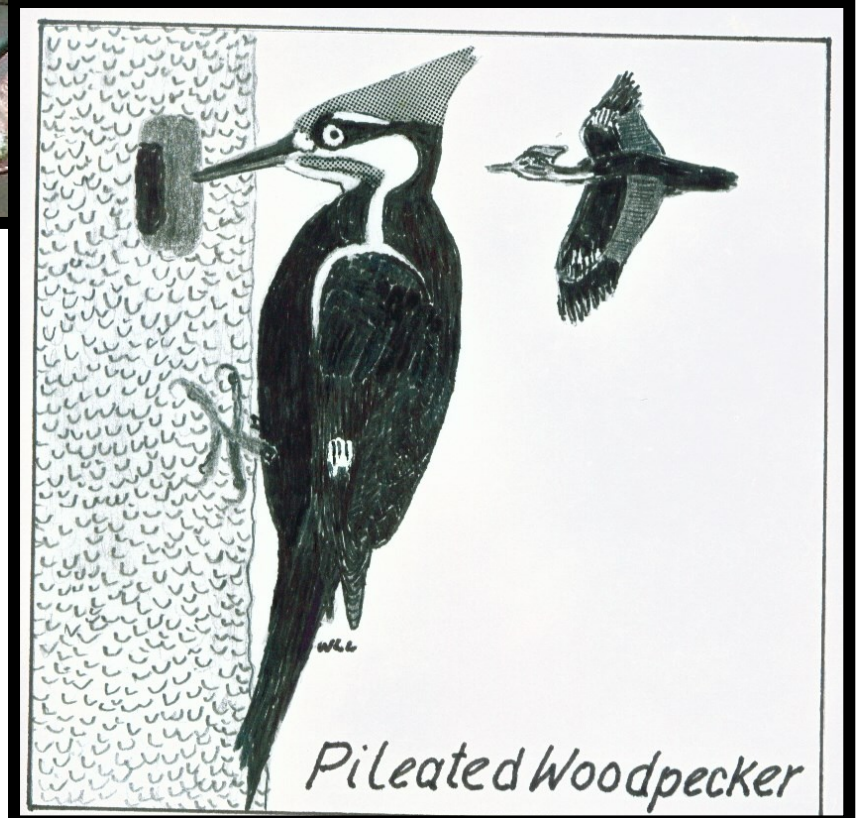
Your first sighting of this large eastern US forest bird may cause a double take due to its size & striking visage. Sorry, but you will have to travel to east Texas to see it. It excavates large rectangular holes in rotting trees in search of carpenter ants. Its nesting holes may later be occupied by other species. **Listen to its unique call by Right Clicking [HERE](#) & Open the Link.** This species serves as the model for our favorite cartoon bird—**Woody Woodpecker.**

allaboutbirds.org

Bird Drawings & Photos

by Bill Lindemann

In addition to founding FNC & FFNC, Bill was a geologist, birder, botanist, odontologist, writer, photographer, woodcarver, and artist. This new feature will showcase some of Bill's photos & attendant drawings. Enjoy!





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

Winston Churchill

Happy New Year!

Dues & Donations are Due in 2024!

At FFNC, we believe that 2024 will be even more successful than 2023. We have plans for trail improvements focused on safety, expanding our educational programming, garden enhancements, & furthering our plans for an Interpretive Center. A large part of the formula for our success is your financial support.

Please consider becoming a Member of FFNC.

Our operations are funded by membership fees & donations.

Donate to the Bill Lindemann Capital Fund
which will fund our future Interpretive Center project.

[Go to https://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com/](https://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com/)

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Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center!**

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

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