

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

April, 2024 Volume 5 Number 4

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

We received just enough winter rain temporally spaced to offer some spring flowers, much improved compared to the last two seasons. Earlier in January, it gave the appearance of a stellar Spring wildflower show with lots of winter rosettes, but lacked the February rains to produce a better showing and give them some vertical rise. Stunted fields of Bluebonnets and Paintbrushes proved welcome, but we often fail to recognize the other floral inhabitants that can aptly fill in as understudies—Groundsels, Prairie Verbena, Phlox, and Deer Pea Vetch have all been seen in glorious patches around the County. Celebrate Mother Nature for her diversity and not just her floral stars.

At FNC, the gardeners have been working busily in the Pollinator Garden and Butterfly Habitat to ready them for the Spring explosion of floral color that is imminent. You will soon be thrilled by this performance as will all of our resident pollinators and nectaring species. We are nearing completion of a revamped trail section near the entrance that was re-routed to provide a safer path down a descending section, and we will follow that with a re-do of the bumper rails along the upper Vista Loop Trail. We are thrilled to be making arrangements with a couple of local volunteer groups to complete this work, and offer them as examples that we invite participation by other volunteer groups or individuals to partner with us on park projects.

April represents prime time at FNC with flowers blooming and birds returning or migrating through with a refreshment stop at FNC. Temps are moderate, and trail improvements await your test drive. Take a hike!!

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

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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 Activities Aboard



Photo by Mary Ellen Terrell

Lending Library

Long time volunteer & former Board member, Tom Hynes, recently designed, built & installed a lending library at the Pollinator Garden . The library, housed in a fairy house structure, offers various texts & guides for the reading pleasure of children & adults while seated in the shade of the Butterfly Pavilion, also designed & built by Tom. Artistry plus woodcraft coalesce to afford a literary repose.

Thanks again Tom!

Another Storywalk!

Spring Break featured another popular **Storywalk** at FNC. Parents could stroll FNC with their children, enjoying nature while being treated to the story of "Ricky the rock that couldn't roll." Reading and nature make for a healthy combination!



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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 8:30am.

The Trail and Garden Crews are working in full Spring mode these days.

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





"Everyone likes birds. What wild creature is more accessible to our eyes and ears, as close to us and everyone in the world, as universal as a bird?"
David Attenborough

Cemetery Birding in March



Jennifer Bristol addresses her audience

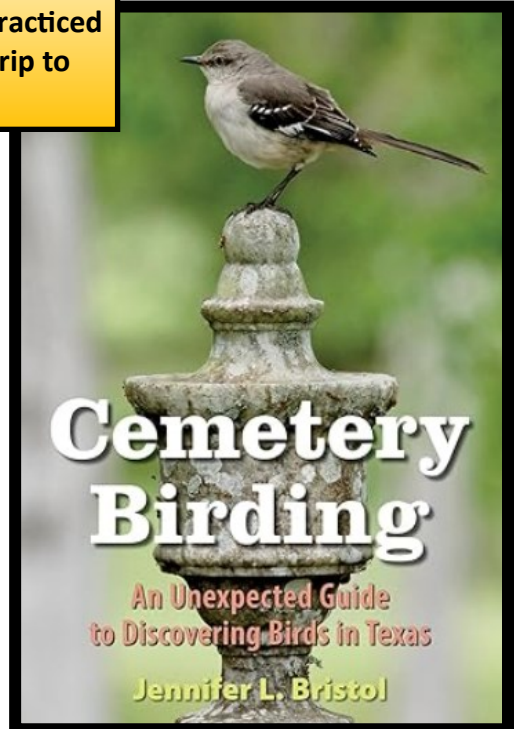


Birding at Greenwood Cemetery

Attendees at our March workshop were treated to lessons on birding in your local cemetery & then practiced those lessons with a birding trip to Greenwood Cemetery.



Jennifer Bristol signs her book



Photos by Patti Guin



"Teaching children about the natural world should be seen as one of the most important events in their lives."

Thomas Berry

FFNC at Touch a Truck



On March 21, FFNC volunteers Barbara Romano, Trudy Eberhardt along with Laura Grant & Lonnie Childs (not pictured) staffed a booth at the City sponsored **Open House & Touch a Truck** event at Marktplatz. The event served as an opportunity to interact with many families & introduce them to FNC. Children were treated to information about Monarch butterflies & given Monarch butterfly rings & coloring sheets to take home. Thanks to our Volunteers!

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 23 Paula Stone, past NPSOT Chapter President, will talk about garden design. She will cover easy styles, basic principles, and what is achievable in our area. Learn how to design the garden you want. 6:30 pm, St. Joseph's Halle, 212 W. San Antonio St., Fredericksburg.

April 26 Bioblitz at Fredericksburg Nature Center in conjunction with City Nature Challenge –San Antonio (see details on page 5).

May 17 "Early Texas Hill Country through the Eyes of Naturalists, Artists, & Women's Lives". Presenters are Lonnie Childs and Katharine Peake. 10:00am-12:00noon at Texas Agrilife Ext Bldg. More details to come.



"We should preserve every scrap of biodiversity as priceless while we learn to use it and come to understand what it means to humanity."
E. O. Wilson

You Too Can Bioblitz in 2024 at FNC



BioBlitz 2024 Event at Fredericksburg Nature Center Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park

Friday, April 26 9:00-11:30am
9:00-9:45am Purple Martin Presentation
10:00am Nature Hike and Bioblitz Hike

In conjunction with the **City Nature Challenge-San Antonio Area**, the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center is sponsoring **BioBlitz 2024**, a free-to-the-public event being held Friday, April 26, 2024, from 9:00 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. at the Fredericksburg Nature Center located at Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park. 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 an application that is downloaded onto your phone called INaturalist. A **BioBlitz** is an event that focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time.

Several events are scheduled in connection with the BioBlitz, including the following: From **9:00 to 9:45 a.m.**, **Kevin Pillow of Wild Birds Unlimited-Kerrville will deliver a presentation on Purple Martins**. Starting at **10:00 a.m.**, you can choose between two hikes: **(1) a leisurely guided tour of the beautiful FNC trails and gardens, or (2) you can attend the BioBlitz hike for Citizen Scientists**, which involves hiking the trails and gardens of FNC to view, identify and record species using the INaturalist application. This hike is a great opportunity to learn to use this amazing tool, record your findings, and help add to the biological inventory of the Fredericksburg Nature Center. All levels are invited to participate in the Citizen Scientist hike. **You can learn more about how to use the INaturalist application by taking the tutorial at <https://cnc-sa.org/learn/>**. FFNC encourages everyone to attend both the presentation on Purple Martins and one of the hikes; however, if you are unable to attend both, you are welcome to attend just one. As an added note, the City Nature Challenge will allow the recording of your results from Friday April 26th through Monday, April 29th.

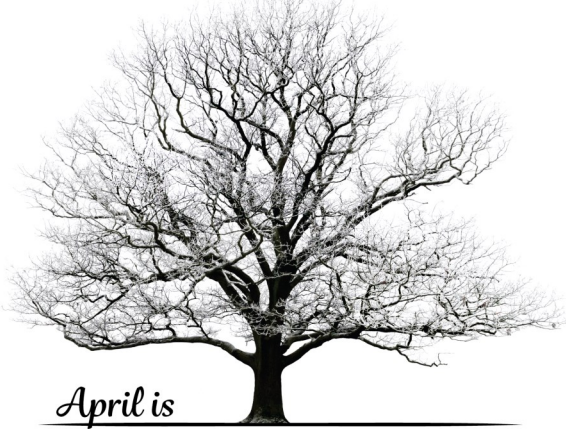
. If you plan on participating in the BioBlitz, please RSVP to info@fredericksburgnaturecenter.com, and let them know which events you would like to attend. On the day of the event, participants should meet at the Entrance Kiosk of the Fredericksburg Nature Center (look for the Purple Martin houses). If you are participating in one of the hikes, please wear comfortable clothing, a hat, and good hiking shoes. Bring water, a hiking stick (if needed), binoculars and your smart phone pre-loaded with the INaturalist application.





"Native plants are the most powerful tool in our conservation tool box; without increasing their use and protection, we will fail in our conservation efforts."
Dr Doug Tallamy

Go Native!



April is

**NATIONAL NATIVE
PLANT MONTH**

Go Native in your home landscape or by protecting the native plant communities and habitats on your land. The Spring wildflower display provides great motivation to learn more and implement your new found knowledge. Here are some ways to increase your native plant expertise.

- **Take a hike at FNC or Cross Mountain Park** to view and identify native plants that catch your eye. Load iNaturalist, iSeek, or any other plant identification app for easy identification and other information.
- **Check out your local Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) chapter** for extensive information on their website

or attend their monthly educational meetings. <https://www.npsot.org/chapters/fredericksburg/>

- **The NPSOT state organization** also provides information and links at <https://www.npsot.org/>
- **The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center** showcases native plants in their Austin botanical garden, offers classes, and provides a wealth of information at <https://www.wildflower.org/>

Why Native Plants?

***Are drought-tolerant, naturally conserving our precious water resources
Provide habitat and food for birds, butterflies, bees and other wildlife***

Don't need special pampering or fertilizing

Are natural to their ecosystem

Help us maintain biological biodiversity - NPSOT



Photos by Lonnie Childs



"We must shrug off our age-old adversarial relationship with nature, the "nature versus us" attitude that may have worked for our ancestors but is deadly to us now." Dr. Doug Tallamy

In Bloom at FNC



Photo by Dot Maginot

Pink Evening Primrose
Oenothera speciosa



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Blue-eyed Grass
Sisyrinchium sp.
Not a grass, it's in the Iris family



Photo by Dot Maginot

Stemless Evening Primrose
Oenothera triloba

In Bloom at FNC



Goldeneye Phlox
Phlox roemeriana

Texas or False Dandelion
Pyrrophappus pauciflorus



Fragrant Mimosa
Mimosa roemeriana

Native Cacti Blooms to Fruit



Pineapple or Pincushion Cactus
Coryphanta sulcata
In fruit

Echinocactus texensis
Horse Crippler
From bloom to fruit



Claret Cup Cactus
Echinocereus triglochidiatus
In bloom

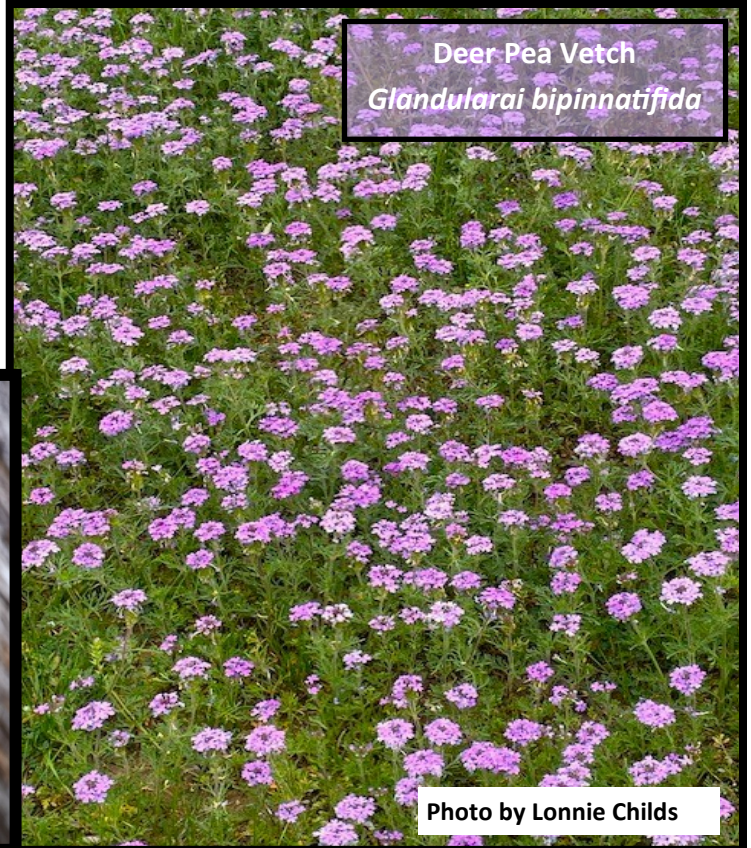


"Flowers always make people better, happier, and more helpful; they are sunshine, food, and medicine for the soul."

Luther Burbank

Blooming Around the County

While the county did not receive expected levels of El Nino rains over the winter & remains in Severe Drought status, the winter rains were well timed to allow many species to thrive. Bluebonnets had a great start but did not receive the necessary February rains to shoot up. Here are some other species that did thrive.



Deer Pea Vetch
Glandularai bipinnatifida



Photo by Dopt Maginot

Photo by Lonnie Childs



Deer Pea Vetch
Vicia ludoviciana

Photo by Dopt Maginot

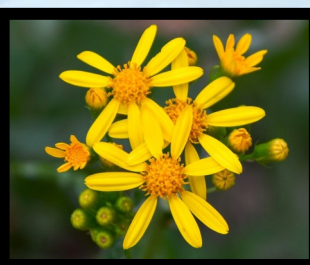
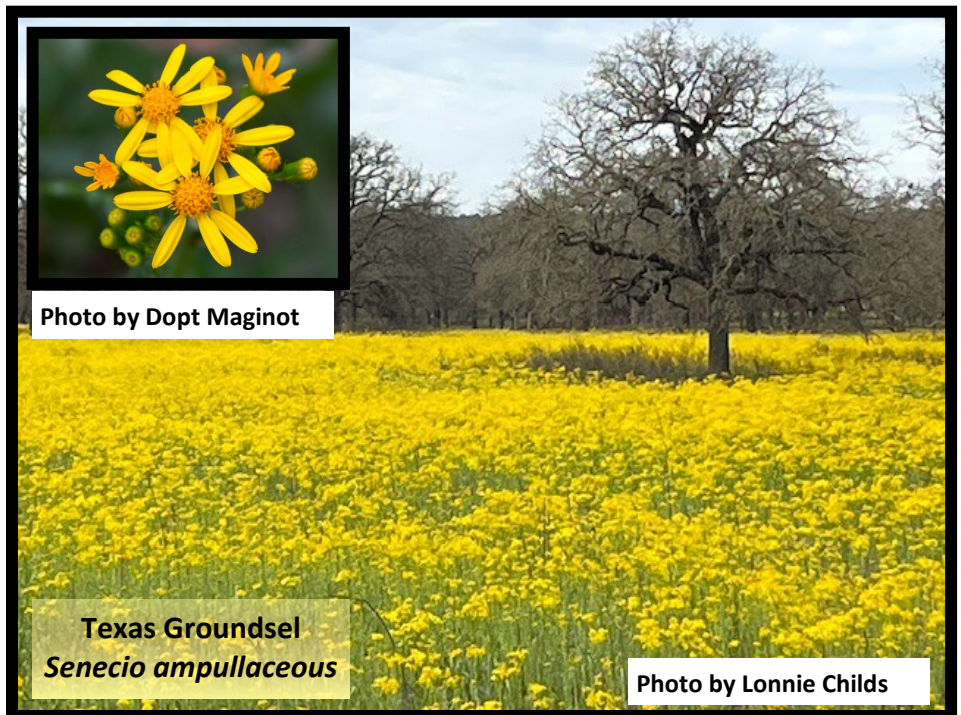


Photo by Dopt Maginot

Texas Groundsel
Senecio ampullaceous

Photo by Lonnie Childs



"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now."
Chinese Proverb

At the Bird Blind Understory

Our efforts to recreate the understory at the Bird Blind are succeeding with these two bird friendly small trees. The **Red Mulberry (*Morus rubra*)** at right is bearing fruit which will support Birds while butterflies will use it as a nectar source. Please plant this native species & NOT its invasive cousin, **White Mulberry (*Morus alba*)** imported from China. The White Mulberry hybridizes with our native Red Mulberry & puts its long-term viability at risk. **Rusty Blackhaw Viburnum (*Viburnum rufidulum*)** produces fruit eaten by birds & mammals as well as flowers that attract nectaring insects.



Red Mulberry
Photo by Mary Ellen Terrell



Rusty Blackhaw Viburnum Photos by Lonnie Childs





"Ok. It's possible that birds may sing just for the joy of it."

Kyo Maclear, [Birds Art Life: A Year of Observation](#)

My Avian Friends are Springing Back with Song by Lonnie Childs

I make no excuses that **Spring** reigns as my favorite season. I appreciate the vital purposes of all the other seasons, and they all have their highlights, but I do not enjoy them as much. They play their part, one of which is to stimulate gratitude for the advent of Spring!

Summers begin by bearing forth the floral fruits of Spring, only to become thirsted and parched by heat and drought, until in desperation, we beseech Mother Nature for an interrupting flood or hurricane. The birds sing only in the cool of morning, and fall silent in afternoons, perched in the canopy shade, searching for a breeze, and "fluttering" (i.e. panting).

Fall brings a temporal rejuvenation, if rains come, followed by the reckoning that the first frost will begin the cycle of dropping and decay—a necessary function in the nutrient cycle. One may be heightened by Fall color or the swirling passage of kettles of hawks and the stratospheric honking of squadrons of Sandhill Cranes speeding south in migration mode. Still, the days shorten and Winter beckons

Although our **Winters** are mostly mild of late punctuated by an occasional ice storm or hard freeze, still they represent short days, barren trees, and mostly silence. Be philosophical I say, for this is the time for rest and subterranean rejuvenation of roots. You can "feel the bone structure of the landscape" and see through it to new vistas. A few of my avian friends (Cardinals, Black-crested Titmice) remain but their song is muted, and seems only to be practice to keep their Spring voice. My mantra is Shelley's quote, "If winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"?

Yes, I am a greedy glutton for Mother Nature's cornucopia of natural wonders that emerge each Spring from winter slumber. But it is not just the visual displays of wildflowers and vernal verdure that elevate my spirit, Spring songs return to greet me as I wander or work in my landscape. Old avian friends return from their winter escape, comforted to have survived the journey, "bird happy" (however that feels) to be at their summer home, and feeling the urge for some romance. Year round residents may simply rejoice for the coming of Spring means better food sources and invigorating hormones. Who wouldn't want to sing out to the world?

"Without birds, where would we have learned that there can be song in the heart?" Hal Borland

Here are some of the avian denizens that greet me in song each Spring. I consider them friends, although they probably think of me as rude and obnoxious, as I clumsily attempt imitation of their song, disrupting their symphonies and serenades. "Sorry honey, I'm just not in the mood. The human is at it again!"



Purple Martins
By Dot Maginot

"I would like to paint the way a bird sings."

Claude Monet

My Avian Friends are Springing Back with Song by Lonnie Childs

Purple Martins (*Progne subis*)— Not really singers, they engage in incessant chatter, but I find it whimsical and charming. Nothing heralds the eminent arrival of spring like the "*chirp, chortle, rattle, and croak*" of a chattering colony. The mature adults may arrive in early February with the youngsters arriving as late as March. Check out our colony at FNC. They make great company around your house and garden, so consider putting up a gourd house. **Listen to their chatter by Right Clicking [Here](#) & Open HyperLink.**

Sandhill Cranes (*Antigone canadensis*) Yes, they are mostly just passing through on their journey north from the coast, but their migration through central Texas in mid-March is usually announced by clarion calls from high in the sky. Oftentimes, you can hear but not see them, which makes me want to yell *Adios amigos*, and *Bienvenidos Primavera!* **Listen to their chatter by Right Clicking [Here](#) & Open HyperLink**

Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) do not arrive here until mid-April. The large bird hangs out in the upper canopy, so is seldom seen but often heard with its distinctive "*ka, ka, kowlp,..*) call. It's song is not musical or melodious, but they issue a familiar call that grounds me in my space. Because they often call at the sound of thunder, they are sometimes colloquially known as a "*rain crow.*" **Listen to their chatter by Right Clicking [Here](#) & Open HyperLink**

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) is common and most responsible probably for creating backyard birders. Although it spends the winter with us, I appreciate their distinctive song that becomes more prevalent in Spring as the males ward off competitors and the females sing from the nest, which is unusual. Their varied repertoire matches their smart red plumage. Scientists have described at least 16 different calls for the Northern Cardinal including my favorite, "*Cheer, cheer, cheer..*"

I could also celebrate the familiar and vociferous *peer, peer, peer* of the diminutive Black-crested Titmouse, or the *chip, chip, chip* backed by the hum of uber-flapping wingbeats of the Black-chinned Hummingbird. It's good to have friends that can sing your Winter Blues away!

Sandhill Cranes by Carol Knutson



**Yellow-billed Cuckoo
by Lonnie Childs**



**Northern Cardinal
by Dot Maginot**



"Adding Nature to your selfie may help keep you from becoming too selfie."
Anonymous

Photo Op Anyone?



Photo by Dot Maginot

Nature's News of the Weird

Tardigrades—The Most Indestructible Creature on Earth
Read all about it. Right Click [HERE](#) & Open Link



**"If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden."
Frances Hodgson Burnett**



**Baby Blue Eyes (*Nemophila phacelioides*)
By Lonnie Childs**

Support FNC in 2024!

**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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**Comments, questions, or future newsletter submissions can be sent to
Lonnie Childs, Newsletter Editor, at lonniechilds@utexas.edu**