

# Fredericksburg Nature Notes



## Newsletter of the Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center

May, 2024 Volume 5 Number 5

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

### Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

Welcome to the Bioblitz 2024 issue. In using the iNaturalist app for identifying and recording species, the Bioblitz event yielded lots of great photos, which I thought that I would share with you in this issue. To add to that, Dot Maginot captured some amazing shots of our newly returned Scissor-tailed Flycatchers along with some other “pretty” birds at FNC. For those who don't like to read much, this is your issue. You can just look at the pictures!

Our FNC Interpretive Center project continues to move forward. We are finalizing initial budget estimates and completing a draft of a Development Agreement with the City, all of which advances us toward a scheduled presentation to the City Council on May 21st and hopeful approval. Subsequent to that, we will have more to share. Please come show your support on the 21st if you can.

A constant and often repeated theme of mine is urging you to take a hike at the park. Maybe I am the boy who cried Hike! But May really is prime time at FNC. With recent rains and the bird migration underway, you cannot imagine what you might see or encounter along the trail. One more time—Go take a hike!

**Happy Nature Trails!**

*Lonnie*

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**Join Us for a Unique Learning Experience About the  
Natural History of the Texas Hill Country!**

**“THROUGH THE EYES OF EARLY  
NATURALISTS, SETTLERS AND ARTISTS”**

**Friday, May 17, 2024 – 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.**

**AgriLife Extension Office  
38 Business Court – Fredericksburg, TX**

**Guest Speakers: Lonnie Childs & Katherine Peake**

***Sponsored by: Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center***

**RSVP to: [gwaggener@flow-apps.com](mailto:gwaggener@flow-apps.com)**

**Approved for Two (2) Hours of TMN Advanced Training Credit**

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**JOIN US FOR A UNIQUE LEARNING EXPERIENCE!** On Friday, May 17, 2024, from 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M., the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center invite you to a unique learning experience about the natural history of the Texas Hill Country as seen through the eyes of early naturalists, settlers, and artists. Texas is the state with the greatest wildlife heritage in the United States and has attracted many important explorers and naturalists throughout its history. Lonnie Childs, President of FFNC, will take you on a journey to explore the background, lives, and work of the some of the most important naturalists whose extensive efforts provide a legacy of exploration and a basis for understanding our modern fauna and flora. Katherine Peake, historian and former Fredericksburg Municipal Judge, will provide you with a history of the natural landscape of the Hill Country through the art of early German-born artists Julian Onderdonk, Richard Petri, Hermann Lungkwitz and Captain Seth Eastman. Additionally, the human landscape of women's experiences will be explored through letters and memoirs of early women settlers. You do not want to miss this unique historical program about the Texas Hill Country. This presentation will be held at the Gillespie County AgriLife Extension Building located at 38 Business Court in Fredericksburg and has been approved for two (2) hours of TMN advanced training credit. **Please RSVP to [gwaggener@flow-apps.com](mailto:gwaggener@flow-apps.com).**





**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.”*

## OLLI Visits FNC

On April 10, Lonnie Childs presented to a class of Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) students at the Hill Country University Center on the subject of the Fredericksburg Nature Center and its diversity of habitats and species. After the classroom presentation, students were treated to a guided tour of the nature center.



Photo by Ross Bigelow

## 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](mailto:gwaggener@flow-apps.com) to receive a weekly email notification about scheduled work tasks for the coming week.







*“Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they have the heart.”*  
Elizabeth Andrew

## “Agents for Good” Do Some Good at FNC

Thirteen “Agents for Good” from the **Absolute Charm Real Estate Group** recently volunteered at FNC to help complete the newly revamped trail section descending from the entrance kiosk. They spread three yards of granite gravel in forty five minutes which must be some kind of record! We always welcome the enthusiastic support of public service oriented groups like this. **Volunteer today!**



**Thanks!**



*..a work day in the park beats a work day in the office, always.”*

Photos by Lonnie Childs





*“Walking is the most perfect form of motion for the person who wants to discover the true life.”* Henry David Thoreau

## Vista Loop Trail West is Open for Hiking

FFNC volunteers recently completed the re-route of the steep section of Vista Loop trail that descended west from the entrance kiosk. The new route increases safety and accessibility and allows for a more peaceful hike through a wooded section before you emerge on to the “prairie to be” opening. We will be adding native vegetation of interest in the wooded section and have seeded the open area with native grasses to begin the restoration of a pocket prairie.



Pocket Prairie restoration in progress.



Photos by Lonnie Childs





*"The only way to save a rhinoceros is to save the environment in which it lives, because there's a mutual dependency between it and millions of other species of both animals and plants."*

**David Attenborough**

## Bioblitz 2024 @ FNC Contributes

Our recent **Bioblitz 2024 @ FNC** on April 26 proved to be educational and fun with a small but dedicated group of naturalists, including some youthful land stewards of the future, which is always inspiring.

**Kevin Pillow, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited in Kerrville**, led off the event with a spirited talk about Purple Martins and how to become a successful Purple Martin host. Our resident colony of Purple Martins provided ample background cheering to his presentation.

We then embarked on a **Bioblitz hike** around FNC to record as many species as we could utilizing the [iNaturalist](#) application as both a species identifying and recording tool. The data automatically registers to our "*Nature of Lady Bird Johnson Park and Fredericksburg Nature Center*" project which serves as a publicly accessible digital record of the species at FNC. The data also loads into the global iNaturalist database to continually update the geographical distribution of species world-wide. This is Citizen Science at work.

Our Bioblitz effort was coordinated to participate in the [City Nature Challenge](#) as part of the San Antonio region, which is a friendly competition to stimulate the use of iNaturalist and provide a boost in recorded data. The preliminary results reveal that the **San Antonio region won amongst Texas cities and earned third place world-wide with 58,520 observations and 3,849 species recorded!** Proudly, FNC can say that we did our little part to contribute to their success. Thanks to all the Bioblitzers who participated and to Patti Guin for leading one of the Bioblitz tours!



**Kevin Pillow advocates for Purple Martins.  
Photo by Lonnie Childs**





**"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

## It's Blumen White Along the Trails

## Bioblitz 2024



**Carolina Woollywhite**  
*Hymenopappus scabiosaeus*



**Diamond Flowers**  
*Stenaria nigricans*



**Wafer Ash or Common Hoptree**  
*Ptelea trifoliata*



**Prairie Larkspur**  
*Delphinium carolinianum*

Photos by  
Lonnie Childs





**"It is that range of biodiversity that we must care for – the whole thing – rather than just one or two stars."**

**David Attenborough**

## **It's Blumen Yellow Along the Trails**

# **Bioblitz 2024**



**Slender-leaf Hymenoxys**  
*Tetraneris linearifolia*



**Brown-eyed Susan**  
*Rudbeckia hirta*



**Texas Dandelion**  
*Pyrhopappus carolinianus*



**Lindheimer Texas Star Daisy**  
*Lindheimera texana*

**Photos by Lonnie Childs**





**"An understanding of the natural world ,and what's in it, is a source of not only great curiosity but great fulfillment."**

**David Attenborough**

**It's Blumen Pink and Purple Along the Trails**

**Bioblitz 2024**



Photo by Patti Guin

Sensitive Briar  
*Mimosa roemeriana*



Skeleton Plant  
*Lygodesmia texana*

Photo by  
Lonnie Childs



Drummond's Onion  
*Allium drummondii*

Photo by  
Lonnie Childs



Prairie Verbena  
*Glandularia bipinnatifida*

Photo by  
Lonnie Childs





*"Teaching a child not to step on a caterpillar is as important to the child as it is to the caterpillar."* Bradley Miller

## Flyin' & Flutterin' @ FNC

## Bioblitz 2024

Spotted Cucumber Beetle on White Rock Lettuce

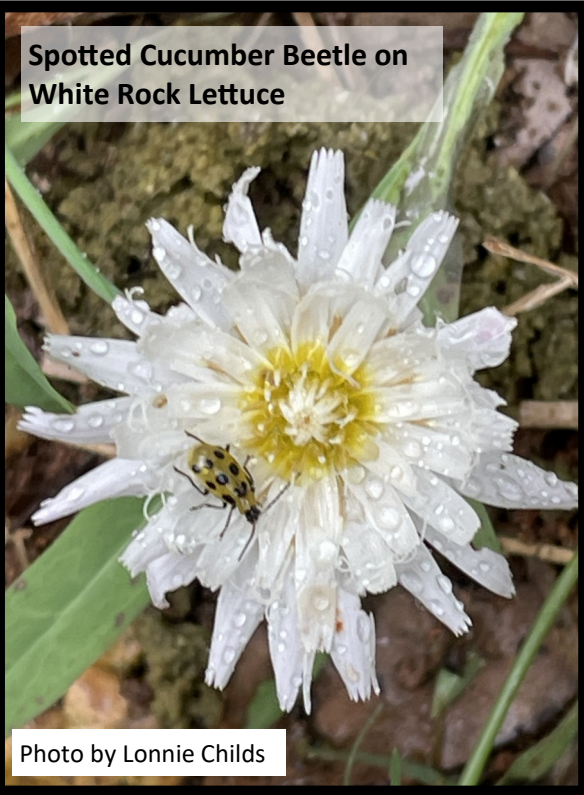


Photo by Lonnie Childs

Speckled Bush Cricket on Texas Primrose



Photo by Patti Guin

Gray Hairstreaks on Antelope Horn Milkweed



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Red Admiral on Mealy Blue Sage

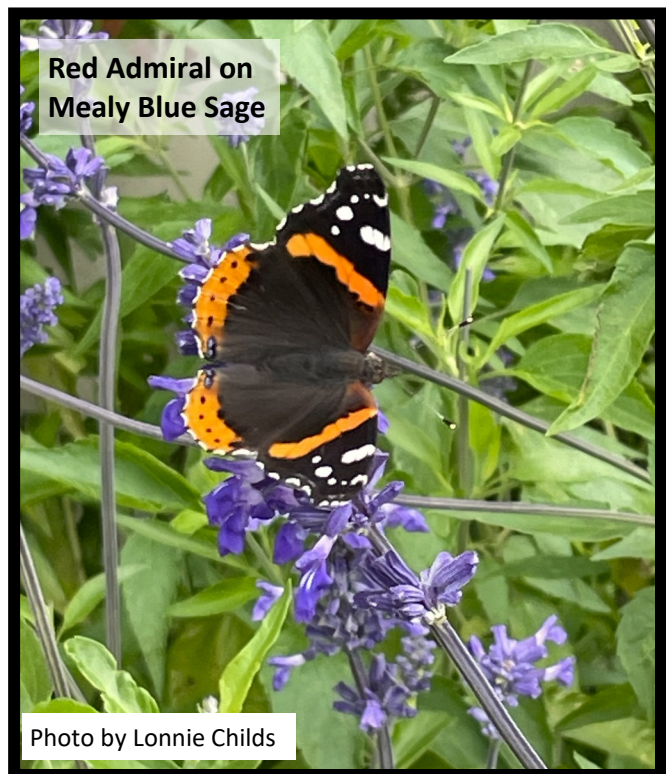


Photo by Lonnie Childs





"There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be a butterfly."  
R. Buckminster Fuller

## A Metamorphic Moment

# Bioblitz 2024

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While photographing this **Black Swallowtail** (*Papilio polyxenes*), we pondered his awkward wing behavior & why he patiently allowed us to observe him. The reason revealed itself when we noticed the empty Chrysalis case. It was a newly emerged adult!



*"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

## The Scissor-tail Flycatchers Return!



One of the indicators of Spring's advent is the arrival of **Scissor-tailed Flycatchers** (*Tyrannus forficatus*). I anticipate seeing their unique silhouette perched on a utility line, suddenly diving off into a tight turn and aerial twist as they expertly capture an unwitting insect. The achieve of and mastery of their flight elicits awe. What a tail!





## Pretty Birds @ FNC

Summer Tanager Male  
*Piranga rubra*



Lesser Goldfinch  
*Spinus psaltria*



Eastern Phoebe  
*Sayornis phoebe*





"How can you expect the birds to sing when their groves are cut down?"

Henry David Thoreau

## More Pretty Birds @ FNC

Western Kingbird  
*Tyrannus verticalis*



Purple Martin Juvenile  
*Progne subis*



Black-chinned  
Hummingbird Female  
*Archilochus alexandri*

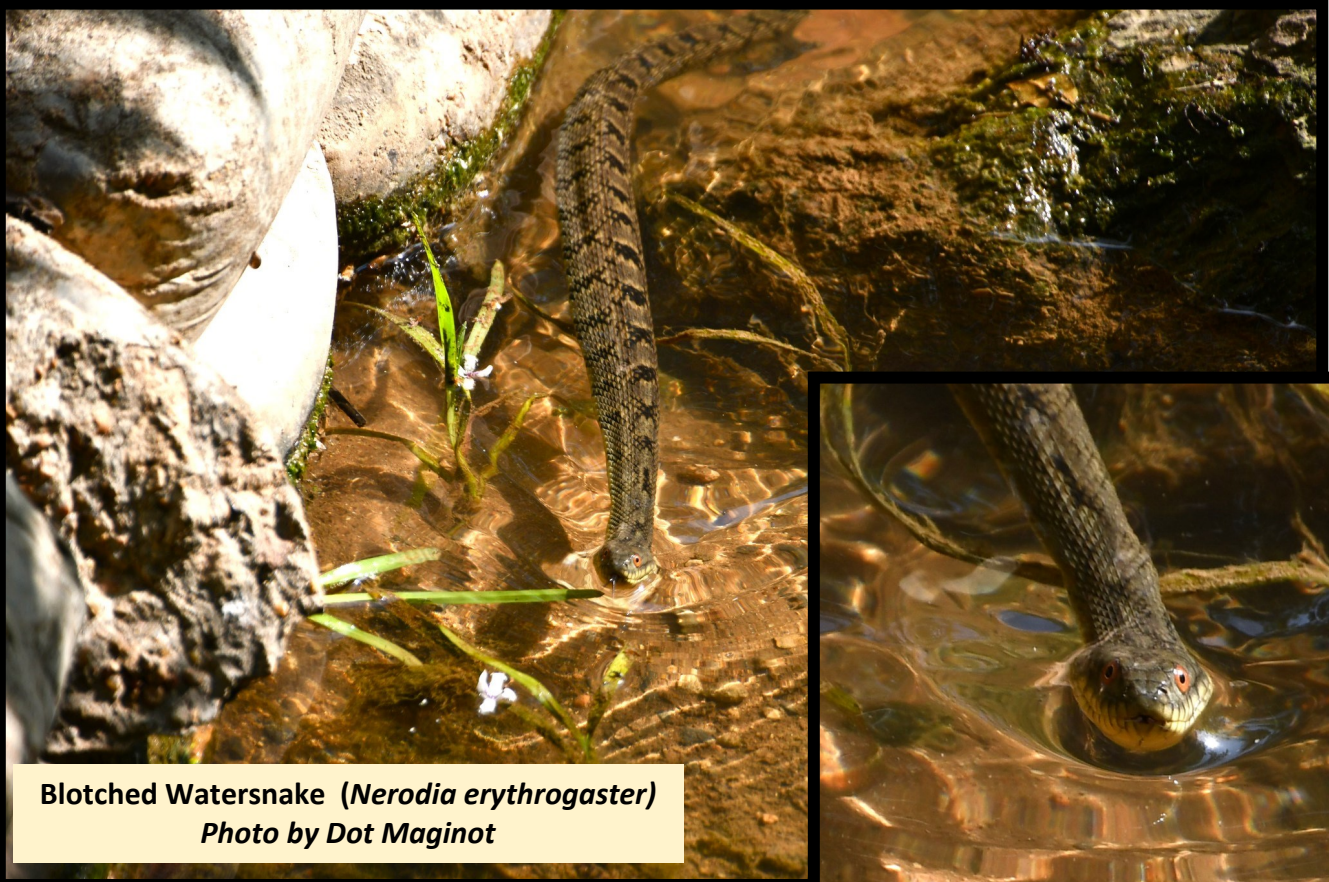






*"Snakes are often maligned or the object of derision in human quotations. You should hear what the snakes say about us."*  
*Herp Crotalus*

## Save Our Snakes Please



**Blotched Watersnake (*Nerodia erythrogaster*)**  
*Photo by Dot Maginot*



# Nature's News of the Weird

*What is the fastest growing plant in the world?*  
*Read all about it. Right Click [HERE](#) & Open Link*





**"Why did the caterpillar cross the road?"**

**To get away from the chicken.**

## **Invasion of the Woolly Bears**

**by Lonnie Childs**

One of the ways that Mother Nature displays her wonder is via sheer numbers. Many species have developed the evolutionary adaptation of "safety in numbers," which provides a mathematical advantage when a predator pursues your cohort. An individual does not have to be the fastest, just faster than his neighbors.

Nature periodically treats us to these spectacles of simultaneous population outbursts in odd fashion, not the typical large flock of birds, but in more mysterious ways like Cicadas emerging in massive numbers at 13 or 17 year intervals. Recently, our somewhat impressive and equally puzzling phenomenon in central Texas would be the large numbers of black fuzzy caterpillars crossing the roads and crawling all over our vegetation. At FNC, look where you step or you will deposit some larval goo on your shoe soles, and one less moth will fly.

The fuzzy crawlers are often referred to as "woolly bears", while the more sophisticated might offer that no, they are really salt marsh moth larva. The accurate answer is both identifications can be correct. Woolly bear is a common term applied to several species of caterpillars that are covered in dense hair and range in colors from black to brown to orange and yellow. They are not a single species but are members of a large group belonging to the subfamily Arctiinae, which includes more than six thousand species. "When people see a fuzzy caterpillar like that, they call it a woolly bear or salt marsh," says Wizzie Brown, a senior extension program specialist at Texas A&M's AgriLife Extension Service, "but there are multiple caterpillars that look like that."

In Texas, we have two common species of moths lumped into the woolly bear category. The **Salt Marsh moth larvae (*Estigmene Acraea* or *Acraea* Moth)** range from brown to black and metamorphose into a beautiful black, gold, and white moth. The other common species is the **Dubious or Garden Tiger moth (*Spilosoma dubia*)** whose caterpillar has a brown bottom with a fuzzy black top and produces an adult white moth with black spectacles.

**Why are we seeing so many caterpillars?** Typically, increased populations of these caterpillars are seen in the fall as they crawl around in search of food sources or a place to spin a cocoon. The



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Salt Marsh Moth Larva & Adult



Courtesy of Passionflowers





**"It is nature that confirms that everything in the universe is connected. This is why it is so important to connect with nature and live in fragments no longer."**  
**E.M. Forster**

## **Invasion of the Woolly Bears**

**by Lonnie Childs**

higher population numbers this spring likely result from a milder winter which allowed ore caterpillars to survive the winter and wake up to enjoy a spring buffet. These caterpillars can wreak havoc on garden vegetables and are considered agricultural pests.

**Are they toxic? Do they sting?** Their hairy cover does provide an advantage in that it provides some warmth in winter, but more importantly, it wards off potential predators who do not find the spiky texture to be palatable. The hairs will not sting you upon touch but may irritate sensitive skin.

Woolly Bears cross the road at .5 mph. Chickens run up to 9 mph, while cars travel at 70 mph or more. The odds run low for the individual Woolly Bear in the game of survival. One can only hope for a slower neighbor. Meanwhile, the species can rely on safety in numbers, and hope that we Humans will not panic at the invasion of the Woolly Bears.



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Garden Tiger Moth  
Larva & Adult

**Checkered Whites (*Pontia protodice*) are also prevalent this Spring in large numbers.**



Photo by Patti Guin



Courtesy of [insectsofiowa.org](http://insectsofiowa.org)





*"What is the good of your stars and trees, your sunrise and the wind, if they do not enter into our daily lives?"*

*E.M. Forster*



*Opuntia macrorhiza* Photo by Patti Guin

**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/>

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**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](mailto:lonniechilds@utexas.edu)