

# Fredericksburg Nature Notes



## Newsletter of the Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center

November, 2024 Volume 5 Number 11

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

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

**Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,**

I should have dubbed this newsletter the service issue. The history and success of FFNC and thus FNC rests on the dedicated shoulders (literally sometimes) of our service minded volunteers. As we approach Thanksgiving, we proffer our heartfelt thanks for our volunteers. Most of our volunteers are also certified Texas Master Naturalists and belong to the Hill Country Chapter whose 2024 class visited FNC in October. We are appreciative of our partnership with that organization and their success at creating an army of trained volunteers dedicated to service in nature. The last ingredient in our service story this month is the volunteerism demonstrated by local firm, Mustard Architecture, who spent a Friday afternoon not at happy hour, but working at FNC helping us to repair a trail railing. Service not only produces significant results, but it feels good and nurtures the soul. As our gratitude for volunteerism grows, we offer you the opportunity to come out to FNC and try it yourself!

We have had great year at FNC with significant accomplishments and great progress on our Interpretive Center project. I will send you an end of the year report in January with all the details. In the interim, have a wonderful holiday. If you need to walk off the turkey dinner or just need to escape your company, remember that you can always come out to FNC for a hike!

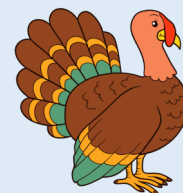
**Happy Nature Trails!**

*Lonnie*

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**There will be no newsletter in December.  
We'll be back in January, 2025.**





## OUR VISION STATEMENT:

*To create a community of Land Stewards to protect our natural resources into the future.*

## Volunteer with FFNC

### Fun Tuesdays at FNC

Typical tasks involve **gardening skills** and **trail improvement and maintenance projects**, 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 (Spring to Fall). We shorten our work period in summer to avoid heat exhaustion!**

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.

### Other Volunteer Opportunities that don't require physical labor:

- **Social Media Editor**—maintain & post content on Facebook
- **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](mailto:lonniechilds@utexas.edu)



*"There's always something to be thankful for on Thanksgiving. Even if it's just not being a turkey. "*

*Unknown*

## Thanksgiving Expressions



### At FFNC, we are thankful for....

- > The opportunity to be stewards of Mother Nature's bountiful offering and trainers of tomorrow's stewards,
- > Our generous members and supporters,
- > Our tireless volunteers including the Hill Country Master Naturalists,
- > Our partnership with the City of Fredericksburg,
- > Our appreciative visitors,
- > Mother Nature who inspires us with her awe, beauty, and the mystery of her natural wonders.

Our photographers Dot Maginot, Lonnie Childs, and Bill Lindemann (in memoriam)





## OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

*Promoting the preservation of our Texas Hill Country ecosystems through education and experiences.*

## Kudos to the Hill Country Master Naturalists!!

The Hill Country Master Naturalist (HCMN) class of 2024 visited FNC on October 19th as part of their class curriculum. They were treated to guided hikes of the nature center focused on habitats and biodiversity led by Billy Guin, Trudy Eberhardt, and Lonnie Childs. The tours were followed by a grass workshop led by Beth McMahan, horticulture agent with the Gillespie County office of Texas A&M Agrilife Extension.

The Texas Master Naturalist Program's mission is *to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas*. Texas Parks and Wildlife and Texas A&M Agrilife Extension sponsor the program which began in 1997. The master naturalists attend classes and field trips which educate them on a diversity of natural science topics followed by requirements for service hours and ongoing Advance Training to achieve and maintain their MN certification. In over 25 years, volunteers numbering 16,700 have been trained and provided 6.935 million hours of service reaching more than 7.115 million Texas residents of all ages with a financial value of \$159.5 million assigned to those service hours. But of course, the real value of their dedication to service is priceless!

We are fortunate to have a Hill Country MN chapter centered in Kerrville that offers annual classes for the surrounding nine counties. Most of the volunteers at FNC are trained and certified via the HCMN chapter, and we are indebted to them for the continued success of FNC.



Photo by Lonnie Childs



*"The quality of your life will be determined by the quality of your contribution. When you work to improve the lives of others, your life improves automatically." Kurek Ashley*

## Mustard Architects Revamps the Trail Rails

On November 15, the team from **Mustard Architects of Fredericksburg** volunteered at FNC and provided their energetic labor and assistance in replacing the trail rails near the entrance kiosk. Their enthusiastic help allowed us to replace about 70 feet of railing which would have required several workdays with our normal volunteer work crew. **Many thanks to the Mustard Team and Gordon Downey, Frank Garcia, and Dave Oelreich of FFNC who led the teams!**

We invite other organizations to volunteer at FNC. For more information, contact Lonnie Childs.



Photo by Lonnie Childs



*"Volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless." by Sherry Anderson*

## Mustard Architects Revamps the Trail Rails



Photos by Lonnie Childs



**“Let me keep my mind on what matters which is my work which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished.”**

**Mary Oliver**

## **Connecting to Nature Through Journaling by Rebecca Stapleton, TMN**

If you Google the definition of nature journaling, it defines it as the practice of drawing or writing in response to nature. A short and sweet definition, but nature journaling encompasses so much more!

It has been medically proven that spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature helps to improve overall physical and mental wellbeing. Health benefits include lowering blood pressure, the reduction of chronic disease, faster recovery time after surgery, boosting the immune system, reduction of anxiety, stress and depression, improvement in the ability to maintain focus, and to increase cognitive brain function. Nature journaling is a wonderful way to spend time with nature and reap the benefits of better health and maintaining life balance.

The only requirements for keeping a nature journal is curiosity and the desire to develop a closer connection with nature by organizing your nature observations, asking questions, and finding explanations. One doesn't have to be an artist or a writer to enjoy nature journaling. There is no wrong way to keep a journal and no set rules on how you choose to journal. You can be as playful and creative or as scientific as you want! Your journal belongs to you and you can choose to share your nature observations with others or keep them private.

The most important part of nature journaling is to enrich your experience while in nature, continuing self learning, discovering new things while promoting a sense of gratitude, and obtaining a deeper understanding of the natural world that we are truly an intricate part of.



"Instructions for living a life.  
Pay attention. Be astonished.  
Tell about it."

Mary Oliver

Connecting to Nature Through Journaling by Rebecca Stapleton, TMN

*American Bullfrog*  
*Lithobates catesbeiana*



American Bullfrogs are the largest true frog found in North America. The sex of the Bullfrog can be determined by the size of the tympanum (external ear). The tympanum of males is larger than the females and during breeding season, May-July; the throat of the male is yellow and the throat of the female is white.

Bullfrogs can live 7 to 9 years in the wild and are always found in or near fresh water.

Rebecca Stapleton



## Still Flutterin' at the Garten



1. Common Swallowtail
2. Gulf Fritillary
3. Orange Sulphur
4. Queen
5. Common Buckeye

## FNC Animal World



We pondered how this White-tailed Deer grew ears whose size is reminiscent of its cousin, the Mule Deer—a gene from their common ancestor? She is well equipped to hear a predator coming!

Photos by Phil Stapleton

### Texas Cooter

*(Pseudemys texana)* is a species of freshwater turtle endemic to Texas & found in the major river basins of central Texas. It is one of 3 Texas cooters. At FNC, we also have similar appearing Red-eared Sliders which are generally smaller & recognizable by the red patch on the sides of their head.



## Winter Photos

Great photos are easy in Spring & Summer with winsome wildflowers backed by vibrant verdure. Autumn sports its colors and berries that provide their own interest. But most would say that Winter has little to offer the photographic eye when the flowers and vegetation have all succumbed. But look closer with a different sensibility. It's a time to look through the missing leaves and see the previously obscured forms and abstract beauty of Mother Nature.



**Sycamores on Live Oak Lake**



**The Grotto stills shows festoons of greenery via Maidenhair Fern**

**A loose tangle of Grapevines along the trail.**





**"Where observation is concerned, chance favors only the prepared mind."**

**Louis Pasteur**

## **The Fall Grass You Can't Miss at 70 mph**

### **Little Blue-stem Grass (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)**

Considered one of the "Big 4" prairie grasses, Little Bluestem is reported to have been the most common grass present in the original Post Oak Savannah and Cross Timbers parts of Texas, and is still a major feature of the tallgrass, midgrass and shortgrass prairies of Texas. In the Hill Country, it is identifiable even at 70mph by its rusty or copper color in the fall. In the balance of the year, it sports a silvery-blue color and a vertical posture.

**Plant it or preserve it!** Numerous birds and small mammals utilize the dried stems for cover and for nesting materials, and the small seeds as a good source of food. According to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Program, many butterflies utilize Little Bluestem as a host plant. Dr. William C. Welch



**Prairie at FNC**

**Photo by Lonnie Childs**



**"There can be no purpose more enspiriting than to begin the age of restoration, reweaving the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us."**  
**E.O. Wilson**

## **Understory Trees are not just Understudies, They can be Sylvan Stars too!** **by Lonnie Childs**

In the past, I have written about the “story of the understory”, one of our most unappreciated habitats. The understory habitat, growing between the mid and high canopy of the Oaks and the ground habitat, provides critical sustenance in the form of food and shelter to those backyard songbirds that we love to view at our feeders. Beyond that, the understory shrubs and trees can provide beauty, color, and interest in contrast to our stately Post and Live Oaks that offer awesome form, but not much in the way of variety. You might initially think of them as accessory trees, but you might discover that they will outshine their larger neighbors.

Tis the season for tree planting in the Hill Country, so we’ll explore various species of understory trees that you can find at FNC in the wild or around the Bird Blind. If you have them, please preserve them. If you don’t, venture out to FNC to check them out and then plant your own!

**Wafer Ash or Common Hoptree (*Ptelea trifoliata*)** is a small shrub or tree with a round crown and slender, crooked trunk reaching about 15 feet as a norm. As a member of the Rue (Citrus) family, its crushed leaves emit a lemon-like aroma that most find to be a little too musky to be pleasant. Hoptrees can grow in full sun on a rocky slope or in the shade of an alluvial plan with richer soil, but it does best in the latter habitat. Its glossy dark green obovate trifoliate leaflets (3 leaflets emanating from a 2” long petiole—the small leafstalk that connects them to the stem) are distinctive for identification. When clusters of greenish-white flowers erupt, Wafer Ash begin to stand out amongst its denizens, only to be followed by clusters of whitish wafer shaped seed pods. The moniker of Common Hoptree derives from its reported use as a substitute for hops in brewing beers in times past.

**Possumhaw (*Ilex decidua*)** is a small, deciduous tree or shrub, 15-30 ft. tall, with pale gray, twiggy, horizontal branches. It exhibits glossy, oval, toothed leaves that remain dark green through autumn until turning yellow. It produces red berries on female trees which provide winter color and are the red berries that you see along roadside Possumhaw growing in fencerows. Their pale gray multi-trunks offer attractive aesthetic forms. The berries serve as important winter fodder for small mammals and birds, especially Cedar Waxwings flocks who sweep and engorge themselves in gluttonous



Leonora Enking

Hoptree



Lonnie Childs



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

**Louise Dickinson Rich**

## **Understory Trees are not just Understudies, They can be Sylvan Stars too!**

**by Lonnie Childs**

fashion. Possumhaw prefer sandy loam soils and can grow in full sun to part shade. If you purchase one, you will want to confirm whether it is a berry producing female or a male, and you will need a male Possumhaw or Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*) nearby to pollinate it. We have a Possumhaw at both the Bird Blind and Pollinator Garden.

**Kidneywood (*Eysenhardtia texana*)** is a multi-trunked leguminous shrub, 10 ft. tall, with an open, airy structure of aromatic, resinous leaves that works well in a xeric garden. With pruning, it can be shaped into a small tree. Growing in

a variety of well-drained soils from rocky calcareous to sandy loam, it thrives in full sun. Its' most fabulous feature is the outburst of spikes of creamy white, fragrant flowers that serve as a major nectar source for insects and attract hordes of native bees, butterflies, and beetles. A nice specimen grows in our Pollinator Garden and can be both heard and smelled when in bloom. It's a real nectar bar!



**Possumhaw**



**David Northington**

**Lonnie Childs**



**Kidneywood**



**Photos by Lonnie Childs**



**"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 Khan**

## **Understory Trees are not just Understudies, They can be Sylvan Stars too!** **by Lonnie Childs**

**Mexican Plum (*Prunus mexicana*)** is the common wild plum of the forest-prairie border or river bottoms—from Missouri and eastern Kansas to Texas. It is a single-trunked, non-suckering species that can grow 10-35 ft. tall with a roundish canopy. Their trunks initially resemble mauvish paperbark that eventually peel to become satiny, blue-gray with darker, horizontal striations. The grand show begins in early Spring with the outburst of very fragrant, attractive white flowers displayed before its leaves appear. The sweet aroma of these plum blossoms easily drifts on the breeze and makes for a pleasant sensory addition to its physical beauty. The plum fruits are edible, but are not particularly sweet from my tree. For reference, you can examine the Mexican Plum growing at the Pollinator Garden.

These are just a few of the possibilities for understory trees to be enjoyed in the wild or planted in your landscape. If you find them on your property, preserve them by protecting them from the deer if necessary. You will find that these trees provide structural and floral beauty while filling in the understory habitat space. Small mammals, birds, and insects will appreciate your stewardship.

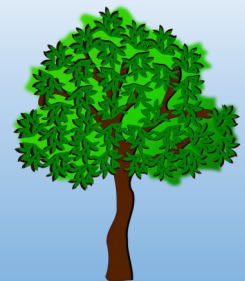


**Mexican Plum**

Lonnie Childs

### **Other understory tree choices to explore:**

- Texas Hawthorn (*Craetagus texana*) or Tracy Hawthorn (*Craetagus tracyi*)
- Mexican or Texas Persimmon (*Diospyros texana*)
- Anacacho Orchid (*Bauhinia lunarioides*)
- Mexican Buckeye (*Ugnadia speciosa*)
- Carolina Buckthorn (*Frangula caroliniana*)
- Eve's Necklace (*Styphnolobium affine*)
- Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*)



**[Source/for more info:](https://www.wildflower.org/plants/)**

**<https://www.wildflower.org/plants/>**



*"There is no way in which to understand the world without first detecting it through the radar-net of our senses."*

Diane Ackerman



Common Egret (*Ardea alba*)  
Photo by Phil Stapleton

**Support FNC in 2024!**

Please consider becoming a  
Member of FFNC.

Our operations are funded by  
membership fees & donations.

Donate to the  
A Vision Worth Growing Campaign  
(Bill Lindemann Capital Fund)  
which will fund our future  
Interpretive Center project.

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

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