

# Fredericksburg Nature Notes



## *Newsletter of the Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center*

January, 2025 Volume 6 Number 1

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

Facebook@fredericksburgnaturecenter

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

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

You might note a bit of a new look to the newsletter format—nothing too radical just a refresh to wake your eyeballs up a bit. You will find that I included no quotes in this issue which might induce episodes of “quotation tremens” in some of you while others may simply shrug and express relief. The fact is that after 50+ newsletter editions, it became increasingly difficult to find interesting and meaningful quotes relevant to the topic. Occasionally, I even fabricated my own quotes under pseudonyms, but no one ever called me out. I will include occasional quotes in future issues, but you “quotaholics” will have to go elsewhere for your quote fixes.

Our annual “President’s Letter” will be forthcoming in the next couple of weeks and will recap our accomplishments and successes in 2024 and provide an update on our Interpretive Center project which is steadily moving forward. We will also be making an appeal for you to consider joining FFNC as a member or making a donation to support our operational costs or our capital campaign. We delay our appeal until the new year to avoid being part of the end of year flurry of requests from most other non-profits, but we hope that you saved something in your bank account for us.

Just as Winter and the New Year is the time of re-set for us, Nature does the same and can be credited for teaching us the lesson. Plants drop the burden of maintaining vegetation and focus on restoring root health. Birds fly south for some R&R in a warmer climate, while many animals fall into some state of reduced metabolism and sleep the winter away. It can be a bit depressing for us Nature Nerds, but there is still much beauty to be found in the shapes and forms that the bareness of Winter presents. We do have our occasional 80 degree Winter days to enjoy with many more sun-filled ones. The Winter Solstice has passed, so our days will stretch longer moving forward and offer hope of a Spring to come. So, get out and take a hike—the best antidote for the Winter blues!

**Happy Nature Trails!**

*Lonnie*

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- FFNC Programs in Spring, 2025
- Nature Journaling: Dark Skies and Bird Migration
- Our Avian Winter Residents
- Feature: White-winged Doves by Bill Lindemann

**Happy 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 9:00am—11:00am during Winter months, weather permitting. Gardening activities are suspended until Spring cleaning begins, typically in February.**

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** — Assist with maintaining & posting content on Facebook & other media
- **Newsletter**—write articles, editing and production
- **Website**—content management, website maintenance
- **Membership management**—recruitment and support
- **Programs**—Assist with planning and organizing workshops and children's activities



**For more information, contact Lonnie Childs at [lonniechilds@utexas.edu](mailto:lonniechilds@utexas.edu)**



**OUR MISSION STATEMENT:**

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

**FFNC Celebrates Our Volunteers**



A Great Horned Owl watches over the desert table



Jane Crone & Gracie Waggener demonstrate the photo booth.

**Thanks  
Volunteers!**



Our FFNC volunteers

On December 15, FFNC celebrated our volunteers with a Volunteer Appreciation Party. Volunteers shed their gloves and work clothes, cleaned up a bit and enjoyed food, games, and camaraderie.



Playing Nature Bingo w/ Trudy Eberhardt

Photo by Lonnie Childs





# Monarch Butterfly Conservation Through Citizen Science

**February 8, 2025  
9:00 am - 1:30 pm  
Texas Agrilife Building  
38 Business Court  
Fredericksburg, TX**



The Hill Country provides critical habitat on the primary migration pathway of Monarchs to and from their wintering grounds in Mexico. Host plants and habitat have declined. Learn how you can help in the effort to create and restore Monarch habitat on your property and public lands.

Presenters: TX Master Naturalists Carla Stang, Sarah Hilburn, and Barb Jansen, with guest speaker Cathy Downs.

### Topics include:

- Monarch anatomy, biology, and life cycle
- Identifying host and nectar plants
- Monitoring larva and reporting data
- Additional resources

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

**4 AT hours #AT25-012**



## FFNC 2025 Spring Program Schedule Takes Shape Save the Dates!

### *Did You Hear That? What's That Bird?*

Patsy & Tom Inglet are the Hill Country's favorite "Bird Nerds" & will bring their extensive birding knowledge to share with attendees at this entertaining & informative workshop. They will share tips & tricks that enable you to identify birds from the sounds of their chirps, whistles, songs, & calls. You will also learn how to verify those identifications via the use of birding apps available on your cellphone. This workshop will benefit novices to experts!



**When: February 22, 2025 10:00am-12:00pm**

**Where: Texas Agrilife Extension Bldg.  
38 Business Court Fredericksburg**

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

**Master Naturalists can earn 2 hours of advance training—AT25-012**

**Free to the public but donations are accepted.**

### **First Saturday Guided Hikes @ Fredericksburg Nature Center**

**March 8      April 5      April 26 (in lieu of May3)      June 7**

**9:00am—10:30am**

We will take a guided hike led by one of our FFNC naturalists which will last approximately 60 minutes and walk 1 mile in length along loop trails which parallel Live Oak Creek. The hike will venture through all of the seven micro-habitats contained within FNC and highlight the flora, fauna, and geology.

Hike starts at the Live Oak Wilderness Trailhead at  
Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park.

The hike is easy to moderate with a few short sections of difficult terrain. Participants should wear good hiking shoes, comfortable clothing, & a hat. Bring a bottle of water & a hiking stick if needed.

**No reservation required—Just show up!**



**April 26, Saturday      City Nature Challenge at Fredericksburg Nature Center**

**A "Bioblitz" event using iNaturalist, guided hikes, & programs TBA. Save the Date!**

## Nature Journaling

# Dark Skies and Bird Migration

By Rebecca Stapleton, Master Naturalist



Maksim Shutov

It's January, and while our gardens are resting and the trees have lost their leaves, we aren't thinking about bird migration. All too soon our bird friends will be preparing to make the journey back to their spring nesting grounds. Each year an estimated 300 million to 1 billion birds will die before making it back. ( per Smithsonian and Texas Parks and Wildlife)

Light pollution is one of the largest factors in migrating bird deaths. Artificial lighting from city lights and buildings interferes with a bird's navigation, disrupting their sense of direction causing them to fly off course. Artificial light disrupts their night vision and increases flight calls that can lead other birds off course with them, which increases collisions with windows and buildings.

What can you do to help?

During migration periods from 11:00 pm to 6:00 am, close blinds and drapes on lighted windows and turn off any lights not needed indoors. Replace exterior house and landscape lights with shielded lighting that directs light downwards. Replace exterior light bulbs with soft, less bright bulbs, and install motion sensors so that lights only come on when motion is detected.

Be a Dark Sky conservation advocate by getting your home Dark Sky certified! Go online to [darkskytexas.org](http://darkskytexas.org) and learn how you can be an advocate for Dark Skies in your neighborhood, and how to certify your home and property to protect our beautiful night sky and wildlife.

**Did you know that Fredericksburg is an International Dark Skies Community? For more information, go to [Dark Skies over Fredericksburg Texas](http://DarkSkiesOverFredericksburgTexas.com) .**



## Bird Migration Periods in Central Texas

*Spring Migration Period: March 1—June 15*

*Peak Spring Migration Period: April 19 – May 7*

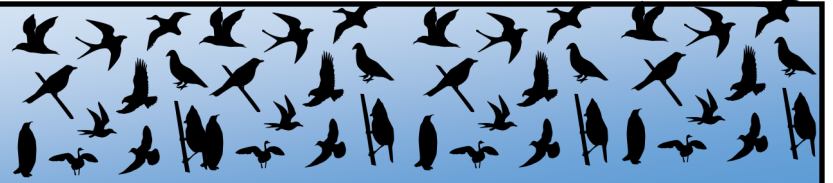
*Full Fall Migration Period: August 15 – November 30*

*Peak Fall Peak Migration Period: September 5 – October 29*

# Lights Out!



## Our Avian Winter Residents



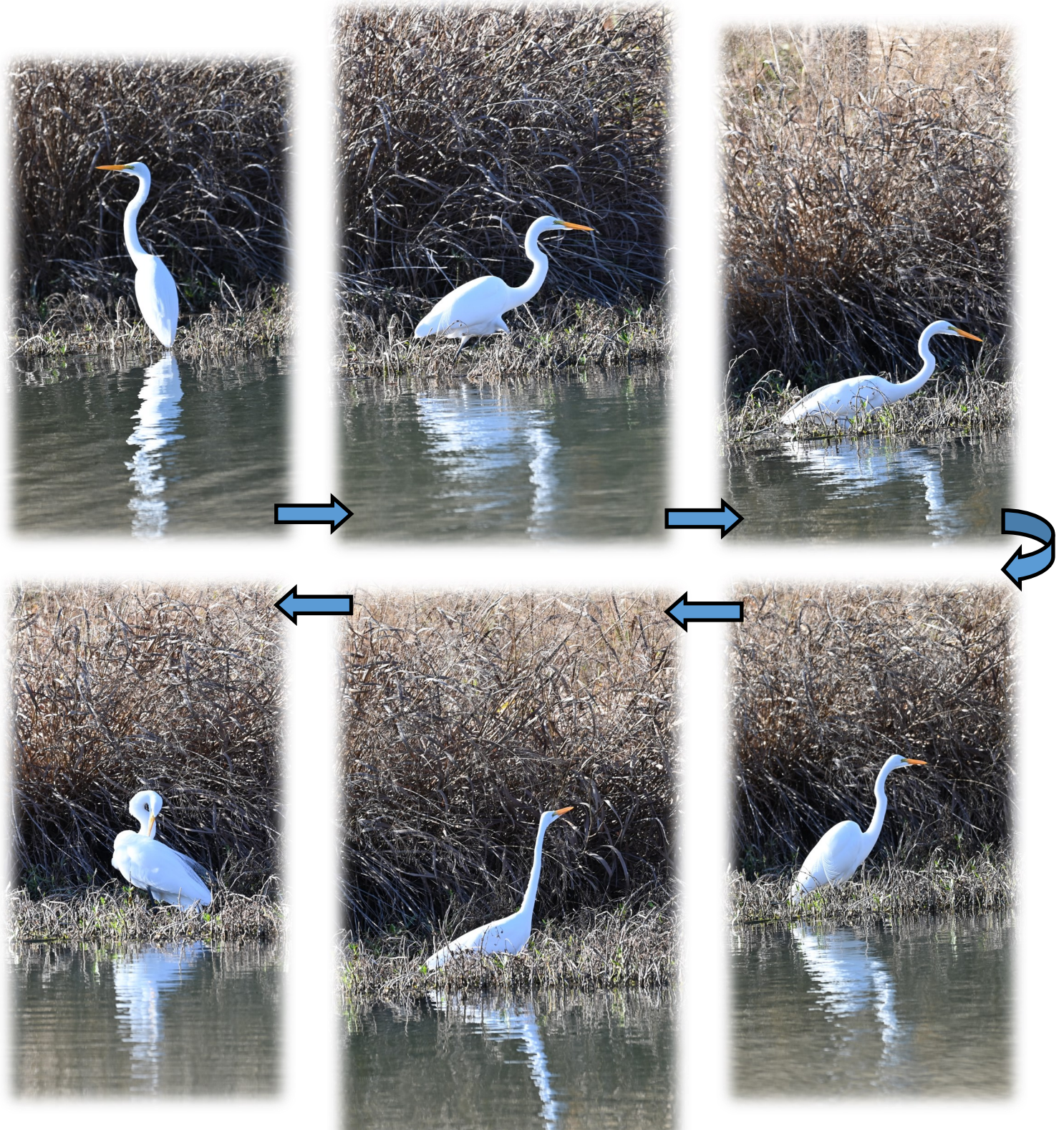
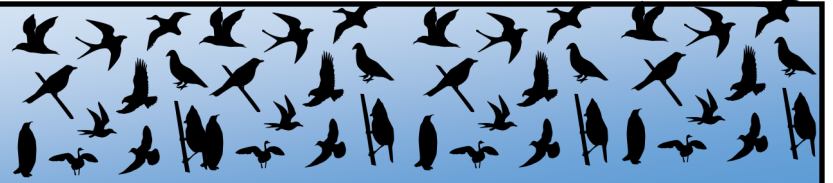
Above, our **Black-crested Titmouse (*Baeolophus atricristatus*)** appears to be perturbed at having his photo taken while our **Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)** acts as if it's a normal day at the Bird Blind, posing for the visitors.



Photos by Phil Stapleton



# Our Avian Winter Residents



**Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)** in various positions as it stalks fish & finally re-coils for some grooming & relaxation

Photos by Lonnie Childs



## Feature Story:

# White-winged Doves a.k.a. "Flying Pigs" by Bill Lindemann

*There is an old expression that we sometimes use when presented with an incredulous assertion that has a miniscule probability of ever occurring. We simply respond, "Yeah right, when pigs fly." Well it could be that the expression is now passé and incredulous events are about to occur.*

*In these dog days of August, few birds visit the Bird Blind in the mid-day heat. It's just too hot for even the local birds, except for one relatively recent interloper. They come in gangs and empty our feeders while driving off other potential diners. They are beautiful birds dressed for fine dining with blue eye shadow and red shoes, but their gluttonous behavior qualifies them for the title of "Flying Pigs." Get ready for strange things to happen.*

*Following is an edited version of an article written by Bill Lindemann and reprised from his newspaper column of the past and our August, 2020 issue Editor*



## **White-winged Doves aka "Flying Pigs"**

The White-winged Dove (WWD) is another of the South Texas birds that has been steadily moving its range northward. First, they expanded their breeding range into Central Texas, and more recently are becoming year round residents. Over the years, many of you may have had a change of heart about the attraction of WWDs as they gorge themselves at your feeder, emptying its contents, while scaring off any competitors.

As the dove's name implies, their white wing patch is very distinctive in flight and serves as its most recognizable feature for identification. Even at rest, the white feathers form a white stripe along the folded wing. About the same size as our resident Mourning Doves, the two species may be confused for each other. WWDs have a shorter, more squared tail. Both doves have prominent white patches on the tips of the outer tail feathers and a short black streak on their necks. Only the White-winged Dove has a patch of blue facial skin around the eye.

Both doves have distinctive calls that distinguish them. The WWD has a barking call that sounds like "who, who cooks for you." The Mourning Dove has the mournful "oowoo-woo-woo-woo" call. Both dove's calls are sometimes mistaken for the call of owls, but owls mainly hoot at dusk or after dark when the doves are silent.

Doves are grain and seed eaters. They eat much of the waste grain left in fields after harvest. Doves will also voraciously frequent back yard feeding areas while preferring to feed on the ground. White-winged Doves supple-

Feature Story (continued):

## White-winged Doves a.k.a. "Flying Pigs"



ment their diets with cactus and succulent flowers and fruits when available. The gradual migration of the WWD further northward is related to favorable food supplies being available.

Traditionally WWDs migrated into the South Texas Scrub brush vegetation zone as far north as San Antonio and returned to Mexico and the Lower Rio Grande Valley for the winter months. In the 1990s, some of the doves did not return to their former winter homes and stayed in San Antonio. Each year that passed saw an increasingly larger number elect not to return to the south. Many of them moved into cities, including most of our major urban areas. The likely reason they stayed is that they found many bird feeders in backyards.

Lot of cities also harbor pecan trees in the suburbs.

Fredericksburg is a good example of where pecan nuts

fall into the streets and are crushed by cars, thus exposing food for hungry doves. I have also observed large flocks of WWDs leaving the city in the mornings for grain fields in the surrounding Hill Country rural areas and return at dusk to their roosts in the city. Some people ascribe this movement of WWD northward to climate change, but finding available food all year negated the reason to migrate southward in the fall. My understanding is that WWDs have moved into the mid Great Plains states, but likely have to retreat southward to survive the harsher northern winters

Primarily because of their larger size, the WWD is a prized target of bird hunters, especially in the Rio Grande Valley. Here, in the fall the doves form huge flocks just before they depart for more temperate climates in Mexico. Despite some birds wintering here, the vast majority still migrate into Mexico for the winter months.

WWDs, like most members of the dove and pigeon family, build poorly constructed platforms of sticks and twigs on a flat forked limb. These doves prefer more arid mesquite woods and usually nest in colonies. The doves will lay two to four creamy white eggs. If you approach a nest after the chicks are hatched, the parent doves will fly to the ground and attempt to distract you with the broken wing act.

*So you decide. White-winged Doves are beautiful birds with interesting alluring calls that make them interesting additions to our backyard habitats. But no one enjoys an obnoxious dinner guest that eats more than their fair portion and steals your dessert! Editor*



To hear the call of the **White-winged Dove**, right click [here](#) and Open Hyperlink.

For the call of the **Mourning Dove** right click [here](#) and Open Hyperlink.





**Happy Trails to you until next month!**



Photo by Phil Stapleton

Live Oak Creek from the dam looking downstream. The micro-wetlands are evident in the small sandbars on lower left covered with grasses. The bright yellowish-tan leaves on the right reveal an American Sycamore tree (*Platanus occidentalis*) in fall color. This Sycamore species serves as an extremely valuable anchor plant in riparian areas and helps to build up the soil bank which in turn raises the water table.

## Nature's News of the Weird

**Moths Can Hear Plants Crying**

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

# Support FNC in 2025!

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/>



Find the latest news about FFNC at  
[Facebook@fredericksburgnaturecenter](https://www.facebook.com/fredericksburgnaturecenter)

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Comments, questions, or future newsletter submissions can be sent to  
Lonnie Childs, Newsletter Editor, at [lonniechilds@utexas.edu](mailto:lonniechilds@utexas.edu)