

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center

August, 2025 Volume 6 Number 8
<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

Facebook@fredericksburgnaturecenter

Editor's Musings: Lonnie Childs

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

The summer rains delivered tragedy and destruction in July, and yet, in contrast to recent years, they have provided occasional showers that punctuate the summer heat, provide some relief, and sustain habitats and their residents. Native grasses have shot up, Post Oaks are previewing a heavy fall mast, and I have seen numerous sets of White-tail Deer fawns, indicating their mothers were enjoying a decent food supply of forbs and browse. Of course, the negative viewpoint would also remind us that the “weeds” are out of control! To paraphrase Ralph Waldo Emerson, a weed is a plant whose virtues have yet to be discovered. Emerson probably wasn't a gardener.

On the education front, we have confirmed with Fisd Elementary Principal Scott Duncan and Superintendent Joe Rodriguez that we will rejuvenate our 3rd Grade Day program in May, 2026. This fifteen year program has brought over 3,000 students to FNC for a day of nature programs and nature immersion. We consider this signature program an important force multiplier in inspiring our youth with a love of nature and a habit of including nature experiences as a component for healthy living. For those motivated by our mission, volunteer to assist with this important event. We promise that it will be fun and rewarding.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

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Phil Stapleton



OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

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

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—10:30am .

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:

- **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
- **Fundraising**

**For more information, contact Lonnie Childs at
lonniechilds@utexas.edu**

*Our projects are approved for service hours by the Hill Country
Master Naturalist chapter.*





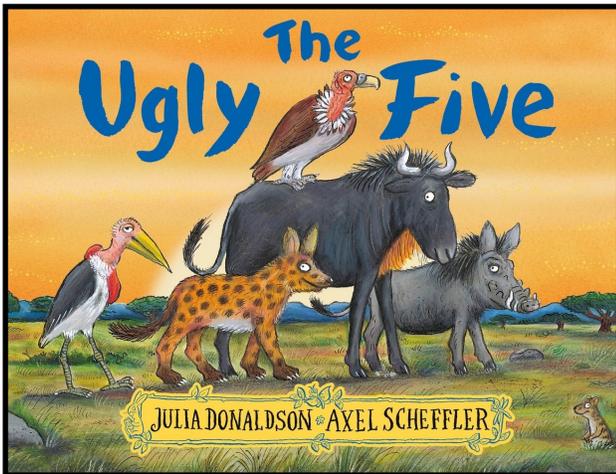
OUR VISION STATEMENT:

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

Storytime Wraps Up for 2026

Our **2025 Summer Storytime in the Park** featured its last program on July 29th. Miss Barb (aka Barbara Jansen) led the kids through a reading of the story titled "*The Ugly Five*." Immediately following the reading, each child created their own "Ugly Critter." FFNC has already announced that this successful fun and exciting summer reading program for children will return in 2026 with expanded offerings.

Many thanks to all the FFNC volunteers who worked behind the scenes and/or assisted with readings and crafts projects. If this looks to be fun and interesting, that's because it is! Volunteer to help next year.



Photos by Trudy Eberhardt and Gracie Waggener

Bugs in the Backyard!



Molly Keck

Molly Keck, a Board-Certified Entomologist & Integrated Pest Management Program Specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, instructed an enthralled group of locals as to why it is important to have bugs in the backyard, at least the beneficial ones. Insects are foundational pollinators in our food chain, & they serve as decomposers who return the food to fundamental components, ready to renew the cycle. Molly taught the crowd about thirty different insects & provided a common sense approach about how to promote the beneficial species & when/how to deal with the aggressive ones. Learn to appreciate those bugs!



Our Favorites!

Photos by
Lonnie Childs

For more information from Molly & Bexar County Agrilife Extension about insects, go to:
<https://bexarento.blogspot.com/>

**Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center
Invites You to**

Take a Hike!

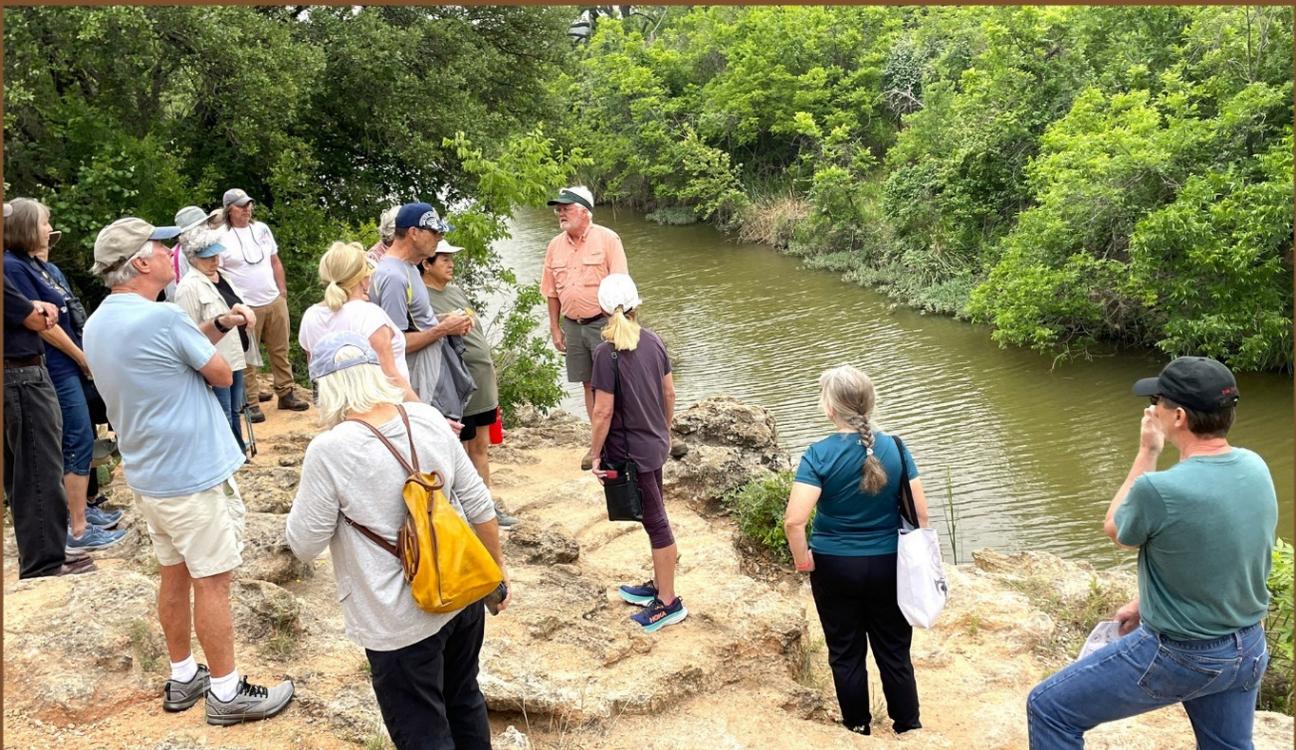
with Texas Master Naturalists Phil & Rebecca Stapleton

Saturday, September 6th and Saturday, October 18th

9:00 - 10:30 A.M. Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park

Rediscover the natural world by joining Texas Master Naturalists Phil and Rebecca Stapleton as they guide you along the nature trails of Fredericksburg Nature Center. The easy to moderate hike covers approximately one mile and traverses seven microhabitats. Highlights include visits to a butterfly habitat, bird blind, and a pollinator garden, each constructed to replicate natural environments to attract birds and pollinators. Hikers should meet at the entrance kiosk near the trailhead adjacent to the parking lot across from the park office. Look for the “Fredericksburg Nature Center” sign. Wear comfortable clothing and hiking shoes, bring water, a hiking stick (if needed) and a hat. Binoculars and cameras are also recommended for those interested in bird watching or photography.

Reserve your spot on one or both of the guided nature hikes by emailing Lonnie Childs at lonniechilds@utexas.edu. Both hikes approved for 1.5 hours of Texas Master Naturalist advanced training credit - AT25-348.



Mark Your Calendar!

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

Join Friends of Fredericksburg
Nature Center for a

STAR PARTY IN THE PARK!

8:30 - 9:30 p.m.

Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park

Let's Talk Turkey!

Saturday, October 11 - 10:00 to 12:00 Noon
AgriLife Extension Office



2 Hours of
TAMU Advanced
Training Credit!

Make Your
Own Turkey
Gall!

Speaker: Ian Mack
Texas Tech Department of Natural Resources

Repose at the Pollinator Garden

Mildred Dworsky sought a moment of peaceful repose by visiting the Pollinator Garden & discovering the **Aldo Leopold** bench. The flowers sang while the Butterflies danced, and she was able to capture these wonderful images.

If you need some relief from worldly cares, try it out. Bring your camera. Show your friends.



Above: Gulf Fritillary (*Dione vanilla*)
on Passion Vine

Right: Monarch (*Danaus Plexippus*)
on Lantana

Below: Elada Checkerspot (*Texola elada*)
on Bush's Sunflower



Photos by Mildred Dworsky

More Flutterin' in the Garten



Clouded Skipper
Lerema accius

As habitat generalists, they are widespread & common. They nectar from a broad variety of flowers, & their caterpillars eat almost all broad-bladed grasses.

Orange Skipperling
Copaeodes aurantiaca

Also a member of the grass skipper family whose caterpillars host on grasses.



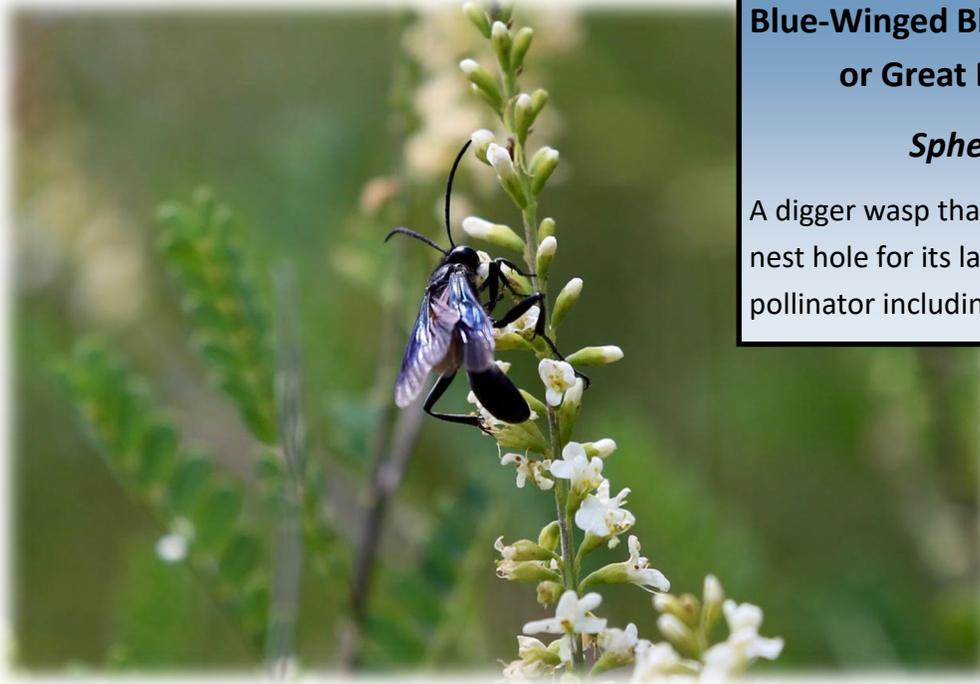
Queen "ethereal"
Danaus gilippus

The Queens are in full regalia fluttering on the Gregg's Blue Mist.

Watch a video [HERE](#).



Bugs in the Garten!



**Blue-Winged Black Thread Waisted Wasp
or Great Black Wasp for short**

Spheg pensylvanicus

A digger wasp that carries paralyzed prey into a nest hole for its larvae to eat. It is an important pollinator including milkweeds.

**Photo by
Phil Stapleton**

Small Milkweed Bug *Lygaeus kalmii*

(larger black & orange bugs on right with X on back)

Oleander or Milkweed Aphid *Aphis nerii*

(mass of smaller orange bugs)

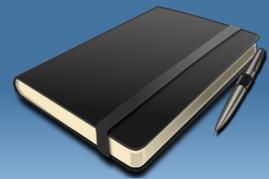
Feeding on **Orange Butterfly Weed**

(*Asclepias tuberosa*) which harbors the horn shaped seedpods.



**Photo by
Lonnie Childs**

Goodbye and Hello



As the seasons flow one into another, mid-August signals the beginning of the autumn bird migration, peaking from September 5 to October 29 and ending November 30. Of course, these set dates, as we know, tend to be fluid. Some of us are already noticing the absence of our favorite birds by the fact that we aren't refilling our bird feeders as often as before!

As we say goodbye and safe journey to the spring and summer birds, we say hello and welcome to the birds coming here to overwinter. To the 400 species of birds migrating through Texas, with some of them stopping at our feeders to rest and refuel, we wish them Godspeed!

Now is the time to clean our bird baths and feeders and provide high energy food to give them the needed energy for the migration. The birds passing through will be glad to receive extra care, and the new birds stopping here to overwinter will need it to help recover from their own journey.

Keep your binoculars within close reach, your field guides handy, and your journal ready! Don't forget to practice *Lights Out*, turning off all non-essential lights from 11:00 pm to 6:00 am during the migration period. Most of all, enjoy!

Sources: *Texas By Nature*, Texas Parks and Wildlife



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
by Rebecca Stapleton

From Pink to Blue @ the Garden



Pink Evening Primrose ***Oenothera speciosa***

While populations in the northern half of Texas live up to the name, populations in the southern part of Texas, including Fredericksburg, open their flowers in the morning & close them each evening.

Lindheimer's Morning Glory ***Ipomoea lindheimeri***

Named after the "Father of Texas Botany", Ferdinand Lindheimer, friend of John Meusebach & visitor to Fredericksburg.



Dayflower or Widow's Tears ***Commelina erecta***

Although it can be aggressive in the wild, it forms a beautiful blue blanket in a meadow. But in a manicured garden, it's a weed!



Photos by Lonnie Childs

Familiar Faunal Favorites @ FNC



Texas or Common Spotted Whiptail
Aspidozelus gularis

Has 6 sub-species. Ranges from Okla into n. Mexico & is common in our sandy prairies. The spots can be seen along the lateral flanks.



Eastern Fox Squirrel
Sciurus niger

The largest tree squirrel in North America. Found in the eastern half of the US, there are three distinct geographical variations in coloration. We are on the western edge of their range.

Photos by
Phil Stapleton

Our Unseen Aquatic Neighbors



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Paper Pondshell *Utterbackia imbecillis* Fresh water mussel in the Mollusk phylum that is widespread across North America east of the Rocky Mountains. It prefers a sandy bottomed creek or lake such as Live Oak Creek, although too much sediment can be harmful. They are sedentary life forms, filter-feeding on the microscopic algae and bacteria that are carried their way by currents. The male must eject sperm into the water, and the female captures it in while filter feeding, thus fertilizing her eggs. As filter feeders, they play a vital role in aquatic ecosystems by improving water quality and providing food and habitat for other organisms. These shells were found washed ashore after our recent flood.

Nature's News of the Weird

15 Amazing Facts About 15 Birds

Right Click [HERE](#) & Open Hyperlink to Article

Feature Story: *The Age of the Beetles* by Lonnie Childs

Reprinted from the September, 2023 issue.

"If one could conclude as to the nature of the Creator from a study of creation, it would appear that God has an inordinate fondness for stars and beetles."

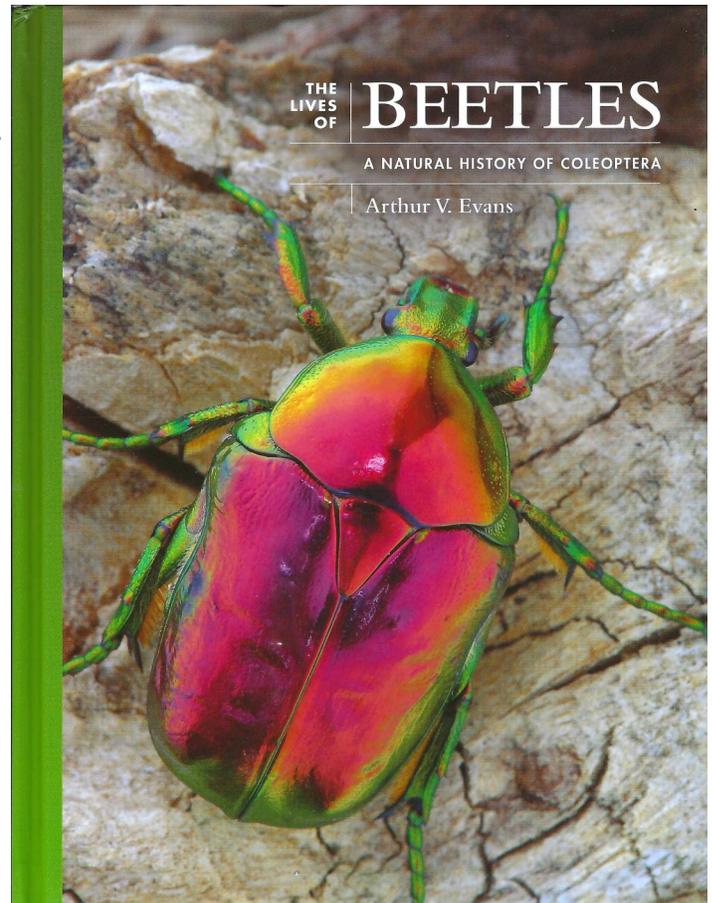
John B. S. Haldane

No, not John, Paul, George, and Ringo. The real and original beetles that date back 322 million years ago and now dazzle the earth with immense biodiversity and a cornucopia of colors and shapes that would outshine a David Bowie and Lady Gaga concert combined. The sheer numbers of beetle species, estimated at 400,000 (22% of defined species), surpasses all the vertebrate species combined by a factor of 10 and suggests that they might in fact be #1 on the all time hits list of most successful organisms. Add to that the theory that beetles were probably the original pollinators of the first flowering plants, and even today they reign as important and prolific pollinators. Beetles rule!

What is the evolutionary key to their longevity and success? First and foremost, their armored body design provides for defense but also enabled a diversity of behaviors ranging from flying to scrambling to squeezing into cracks to hide. Their tough exoskeleton functions as both skin and skeleton, and if viewed with a microscope would reveal an array of intricate structures that provide varying functionality. The exoskeleton consists of segments that are connected by flexible hinges like a suit of medieval armor that provide for their mobility. The sum of all this evolved morphology is a small, compact body resembling the Mars Rover with all its sturdiness and mobility.

Habitat and Adaptability. Because of their diverse morphology and adaptive behaviors, beetles populate a huge diversity of habitats with one common feature— a diversity of native plants. Some beetles inhabit living plants but also decaying logs and snags. Others can live amongst the lowly fungi and mosses under rocks and other debris. There are beetles who enjoy rolling around in leaf litter and compost while their aquatic cousins appreciate a life on streams, in ponds, or along their shorelines. And then there are the dung beetles who enjoy that stuff and their carrion consuming cousins who relish rotting flesh. The diversity of beetle morphology and behavior allows them to thrive in a wide assortment of habitats which in turn better ensures the survival of the beetle family. The only environment where they do not thrive is one tainted with pesticides.

The great defenders. As I previously mentioned, the evolutionary success of beetles rests partially on their varied and successful defensive strategies. Perhaps because of their large species and population numbers



Beetles are classified in the *Coleoptera* order which was first described as a group by Aristotle. The name derives from Greek words that translate to “winged sheath”. Linnaeus consecrated this order in his system of classification.

Feature Story: *The Age of the Beetles*

present in a diversity of habitats, it seems that everyone enjoys a *Coleopteran* culinary delight—mammals, birds, amphibians, spider, ants, robber flies, and even other beetles. Some attack at night while others prey in the day. What's a beetle to do?

Beetles have evolved a wide variety of defensive strategies to counter these ever-present predators. Their first line of defense is **structural** and depends on their thick, hard exoskeleton that serves as a shield and which is complemented in some species by folding or strong legs, horns, formidable mandibles, sharp claws, or size. These structural advantages may be supplemented in some species with **defensive behaviors** like running fast, jumping when attacked, hunkering down like a turtle, or engaging in thanatopsis (i.e. death feigning).

Adding to these structural and behavioral strategies, other beetles utilize **chemical defenses** that rely either on special glands to produce toxins or extract them from food to be stored in chambers or in their blood. The delivery mechanisms for these defensive toxins are equally varied, but my favorite are the bombardier beetles who possess an anal turret for spraying out caustic hydrogen peroxide gas. Many of us have encountered beetles who emitted noxious odors including ammonia gas (i.e. “stink bugs”), or perhaps unfortunately had an encounter with a blister beetle who discharge a bright yellow caustic compound from their leg joints that can produce blisters on the human skin. For justifiable reasons, beetles have evidently never signed on to the UN ban on the use of chemical weapons.

The final category of defensive strategies involves the use of **coloration** to disguise themselves to trick potential predators. Many species use what is known as aposematic coloration which warns the predator that they will not be a suitable meal for some reason. Others will have coloration that mimics another undesirable species and thus tricks the predator. This combination of defensive techniques represent the same relationship between Monarch and Queen butterflies. Finally, many species employ camouflaging coloration (i.e. Mimesis) as a method to disappear into their habitat. Interestingly, iridescent coloration which is frequently seen on many beetles may be used as aposematic coloration or as mimicry.

Are beetles pests? Depends on the species and your perspective. As mentioned earlier, beetles provide significant pollination services. Plant-eating beetles perform a vital ecological service in breaking down plant materials into nutrients that can be recycled into the environment. Almost every plant species hosts a beetle that feasts on its vegetation. They can also serve as biocontrols on plant populations, not allowing them



Photo by Bill Lindemann

Long-horned Beetle or Longicorns are members of the *Cerambycidae* family which includes 35K species. A few like the invasive Asian species are destructive in the US.

Feature Story: *The Age of the Beetles*

to grow beyond sustainable limits. However, when beetle populations attack ornamental and landscape plants, agricultural crops, and timber forests, they can exact economic damage.

These negative impacts often result from invasive (Non-native) species with no natural biocontrols present which frees them to spread aggressively and inflict environmental and/or economic harm. Many of our beetle pests are either Asian or European in origin such as the Japanese beetle that inflicts major harm to ornamental or agricultural plants in the eastern US, the longhorn beetle that ravages hardwoods, or the emerald ash borer which attacks ash trees and has migrated from the eastern US and Midwest into Texas.

In the **ecological benefits** ledger, I have already mentioned several important ecological services proffered by beetles. Although I personally have reservations about the introduction of any non-native species, beetles are being employed as biocontrols against invasive plant species with some success. The best example is the use of the tamarisk beetle to combat the tamarisk choked streams in the western US—tamarisk was unfortunately introduced for erosion control. As I said, humans fixing environmental problems created by humans fixing environmental problems worries me.

In the **cause of science**, *Dermestes* beetles are flesh-eating beetles which make rapid meals of faunal specimens to produce skeletons for research. The defensive secretions of some beetles are complex compounds that offer potential breakthroughs for medicine and science but have been little studied to date. On the subject of food, three hundred beetle species provide sustenance to humans around the world. With the rising costs of animal based protein, some are lobbying for the increased farming and consumption of insects such as beetles as a sustainable food source. Are you ready for a MacBeetle? Barbecued beetle? Or more likely mealworm flour?

Beetles and Humans. The historical record preserves a long history of the association of human civilization with beetles. Their image appears in rock art, statuary, jewelry, precious stones, coins and manuscripts. Ancient Egyptians were enthralled with dung-rolling scarabs and featured them in hieroglyphs as symbols of protection, growth, and existence. In Egyptian times, beetles were truly rock stars, literally. In current times, one Central Mexican species adorns women's dresses affixed to a chain as living jewelry.

Why beetles are important. While ancient civilizations appeared to appreciate the value of beetles, their status in the modern world is not so assured. Their ubiquity, adaptability, and evolutionary success has earned them their significant status in the ecological hierarchy as a paradigm for biomimicry (i.e.) They offer us important ecological services and opportunities for future research that could inspire advances in medicine, science, and technology. Yes, they can appear as ugly, creepy crawlies spraying stink bombs out of their anuses, but put on your ecological citizens hat, and look past their bad habits. **John Lennon** did.



Photo by Lonnie Childs

Tiger Beetles are members of the *Cicindelidae* family which are known as fast runners & ferocious predators.

Feature Story: *The Age of the Beetles*

Photo by Bill Lindemann



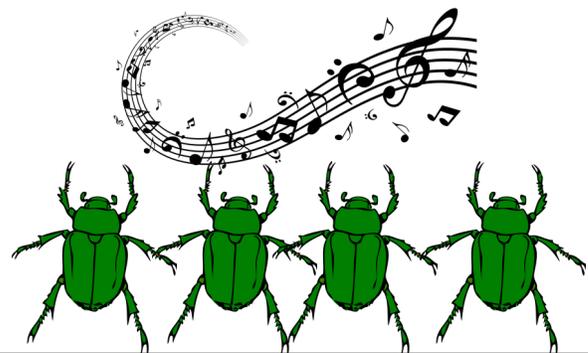
Soldier Beetles (*Cantharidae*) are relatively soft-bodied, straight-sided beetles that are widely distributed.

Photo by Bill Lindemann



Red Milkweed Beetle (*Tetraopes tetropthalmus*)

A longhorn beetle known for its bright red and black coloration, which serves as a warning to predators about its toxicity.



"The idea of beetles came into my head. I decided to spell it BEATles to make it look like beat music, just a joke."

John Lennon

Promoting Children's Health

Inspiring the Land Stewards of Tomorrow



A Vision Worth Growing Campaign



Find out more about our plans for a future Interpretive Center founded on the themes of **Nature, Youth, Education, & Community** with a focus on developing tomorrow's Land Stewards and promoting the health of our children. See how you can support the **A Vision Worth Growing Campaign** by Right Clicking [Here](#).



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/>



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