

# Fredericksburg Nature Notes



## Newsletter of the Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center

September, 2025 Volume 6 Number 9

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

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### Editor's Musings: Lonnie Childs

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

Education about and experiences in nature are fundamental to FFNC's mission statement, and in that vein, we are offering upcoming opportunities for you to enjoy in the next two months. On the terrestrial side, we will conduct one more guided hike led by the Stapleton's in October which affords education within an experience. If gazing up at the celestial wonders of the universe suits you, then you will love our first ever star parties scheduled for both September and October. Up or down, both programs will encourage you to slow down and marvel at the natural phenomenon that surround us. And if you are inspired, *"go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere."*

Our *A Vision Worth Growing Campaign* continues to progress as we are close to completing our detailed design for the building and interpretive landscape. We are interviewing candidates for an Interpretive Exhibits provider to begin developing a conceptual plan. In the background, we are focused on fundraising which will determine our construction schedule. If you are interested in supporting or participating in our project, the phone lines are always open!

Happy Nature Trails!

*Lonnie*

#### In this Issue:

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- *What's this Bill?* Ash-throated Flycatcher





## 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](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 projects are approved for service hours by the Hill Country  
Texas Master Naturalist chapter.*

#### Equipment Need:

We could use two metal barstools with backs for use at our Bird Blind. The existing wood chairs are literally on their last legs. Please contact us if you have two to donate.





## **OUR VISION STATEMENT:**

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

## **Welcome to the HCMN Class of 2025!**

The Friends organization held a Meet and Greet party to welcome the Gillespie County members of the Texas Master Naturalist—Hill Country Chapter class of 2025. To become a certified Texas Master Naturalist, they will attend a 12-week training course, then complete 40 volunteer hours and 8 advanced training hours within 1 year of training. The Hill Country chapter encompasses a 10 county area including Gillespie County. The majority of our FFNC volunteer base are Master Naturalists who attain their volunteer hours by working on approved service projects with FFNC. We congratulate the 2025 class members and look forward to continuing our partnership with the Hill Country chapter.

*The mission of the Texas Master Naturalists is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas.*



Photos by Patti Guin



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

# **Take a Hike!**

**with Texas Master Naturalists Phil & Rebecca Stapleton**

**Saturday, September 6<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, October 18<sup>th</sup>**

**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](mailto: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  
TMN Advanced  
Training Credit!

Make Your  
Own Turkey

Sorry, but we have had to CANCEL this presentation. You can still take a hike or come to the star party in October!

Nature Journaling—By Rebecca Stapleton, TMN

*Looking for Love*  
*The Texas Brown Tarantula*



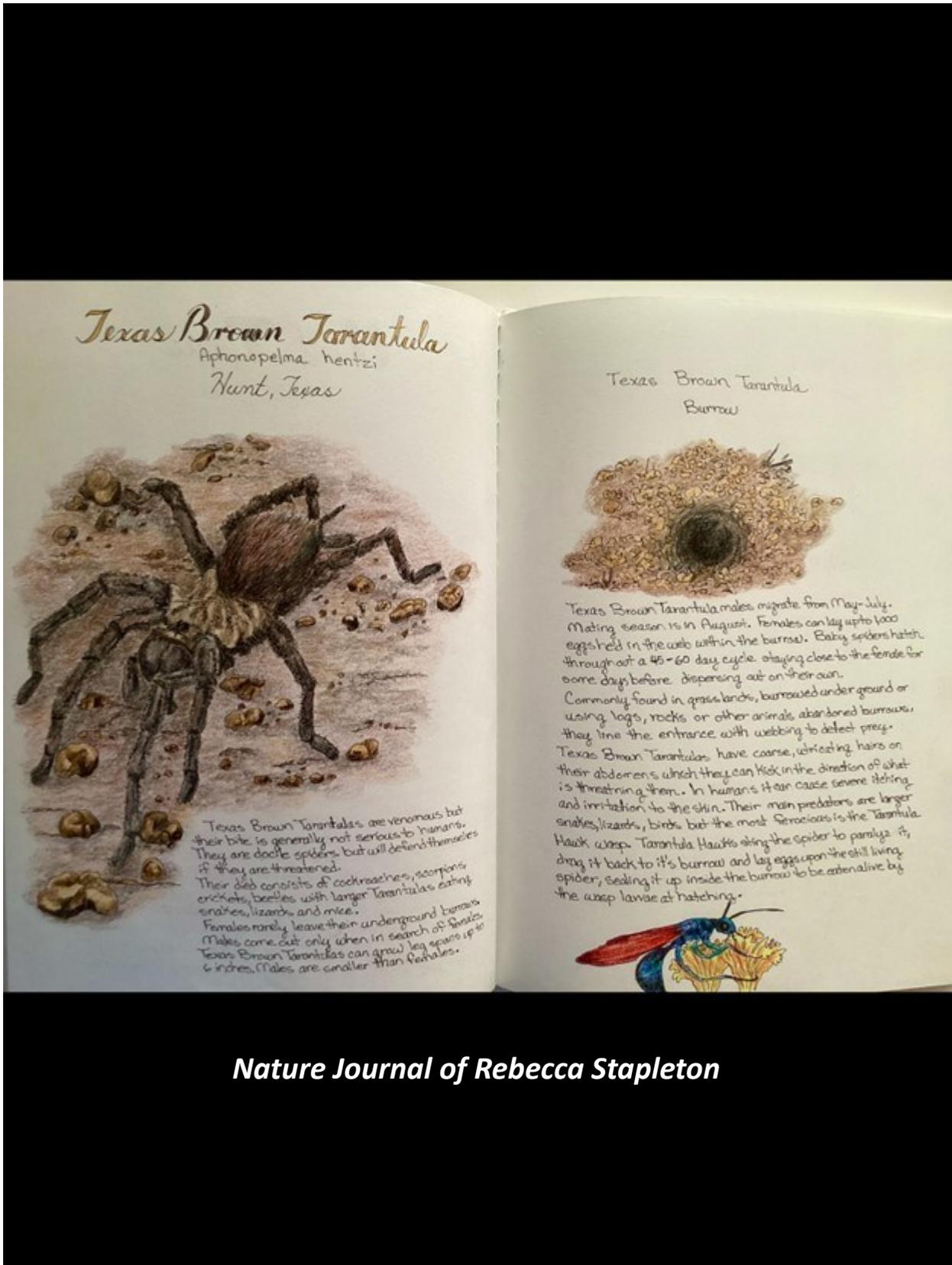
The **Texas Brown Tarantula**, *Aphonopelma hentzi*, is the largest of the Texas spiders with legs about 3 to 4 inches wide and weighing up to 3 ounces. In spite of their intimidating size, they are very docile and only bite as a last resort. The first action of defense is to release hairs on its abdomen that cause skin irritation. If that fails, they will stand on their hind legs exposing large fangs in an effort to frighten away its predator. Texas Brown Tarantulas are non venomous to humans. They are the gentle giants of Texas spiders.

Texas Brown Tarantulas are nocturnal spiders, hunting at night for insects and small vertebrates. Unlike other spiders that weave intricate webs to capture their prey, they run down their prey, pouncing on it, killing it with its fangs, and then injecting it with digestive fluids before eating it.

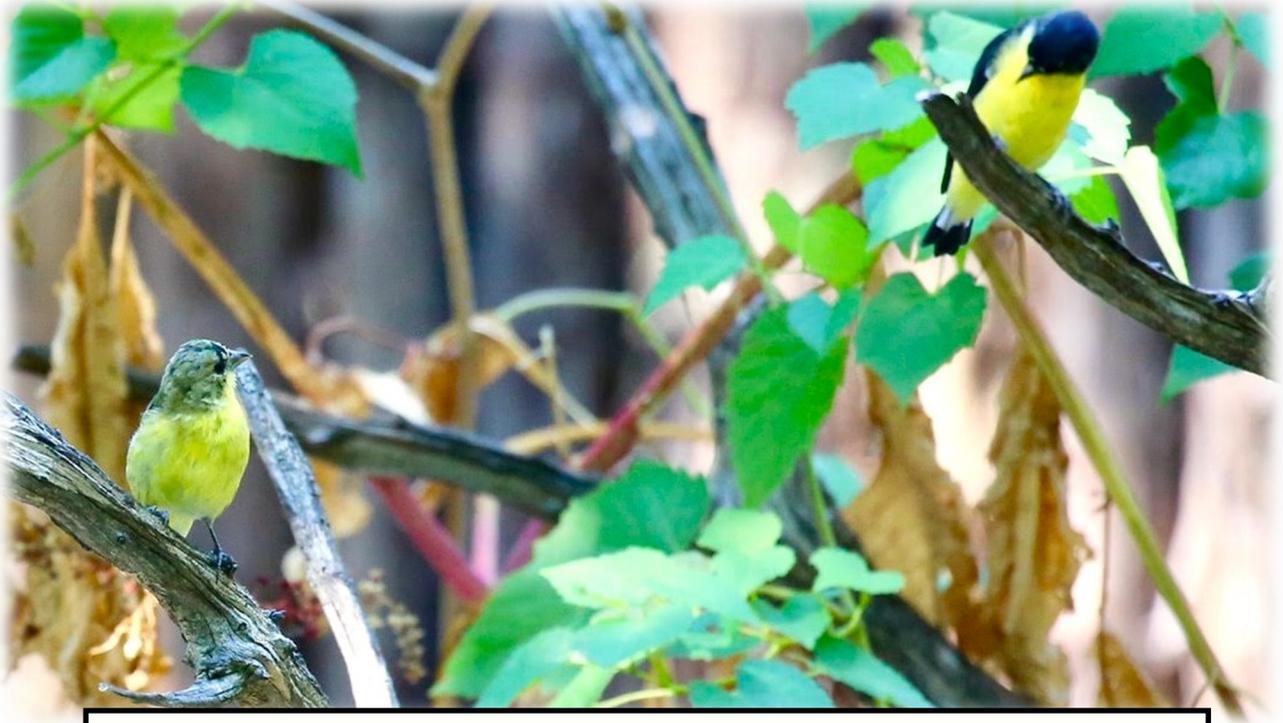
From September through November, male Texas Brown Tarantulas looking for love wander from their burrows in search of females tucked away in their own burrows in grasslands, rocks and logs. Texas Brown Tarantulas are terrestrial spiders spending most of their life in these silk lined underground burrows. During mating season, the males tap on the nickel size opening of a female's burrow to see if she will come outside. He then does a mating dance to entice her to mate with him. If he doesn't meet with her approval, he ends up becoming her next meal.



Photo by Bill Lindemann



## Pájaros at the Bird Blind



Is he giving her his best look? Lesser Goldfinch female & male (*Spinus psaltria*)  
Photo by Phil Stapleton



A threatening look from a little guy? Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)  
Photo by Lonnie Childs

# Save Our Pájaros Please

## Lights Out Gillespie County!!

The fall bird migration has started, so it's time to implement measures to reduce mortality in the billions of migratory birds that fly over Texas annually.

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

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

### Following are some actions that you can take.

- Turn off all non-essential lights from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. each night during migration season.
- Do not use landscape lighting to light up trees or gardens where birds may be resting.
- For essential lights (security & safety lighting), use the following dark skies friendly lighting practices:
  - > Aim lights down;
  - > Use lighting shields to direct light downwards and avoid light shining into the sky or trees;
  - > Use motion detectors and sensors so lights are only on when you need them;

## What Kills Birds?

For information on how to prevent bird deaths,  
go to <https://urbanbird.org/reducing-bird-strike-mortality/>

| HAZARD                             | MINIMUM RANGE | MAXIMUM RANGE | AVERAGE ESTIMATE |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| Cats                               | 1,400,000,000 | 3,700,000,000 | 2,400,000,000    |
| Building Glass Collision           | 365,000,000   | 988,000,000   | 599,000,000      |
| Vehicle Collisions                 | 89,000,000    | 340,000,000   | 214,500,000      |
| Poison                             |               |               | 72,000,000       |
| Electrical Line Collisions         | 8,000,000     | 57,300,000    | 25,500,000       |
| Hunting (ducks and geese)          |               |               | 19,000,000       |
| Communications Towers Collisions   |               |               | 6,600,000        |
| Electrocutions                     | 900,000       | 11,600,000    | 5,600,000        |
| Oil Pits                           | 500,000       | 1,000,000     | 750,000          |
| Land-Based Wind Turbine Collisions | 140,438       | 327,586       | 234,012          |
| Industrial Fishing Bycatch         |               |               | 100,000+         |

**Note: Numbers represent annual estimates.**

Credit: USDA Forest Service Gen. Tech. Rep. PSW-GTR-191. 2005.

## Blumen at the Gartens



**Turkscap (*Malaviscus arboreus*)**  
A member of the Mallow family



**Lindheimer's Senna**  
*Senna lindheimeriana*



**Fall Obedient Plant**  
*Physostegia virginiana*

## Flutterin' Around @ FNC

"Move it on over..."

Does the **Bordered Patch** butterfly realize that he is about to be ambushed by an unknown bee?

The attracting bloom is an **Almond Verbena (*Aloysia virgata*)** that exudes a fragrance of almond & vanilla that insects can't resist. The well adapted Brazilian native is a cousin to our native Beebrush (*Aloysia gratissima*) & acts as a perennial reaching 8'. Both species are bee magnets.



Gulf Fritillary (*Dione vanilla*) on  
Turkscap (*Malaviscus arboreus*)



Swift Setwing (*Dythemis velox*)  
performing some dragonfly yoga  
with its signature posture?



Photos by Phil Stapleton

## Handsome in Velvet



Photo by  
Phil Stapleton

**Whitetail Buck (*Odocoileus virginianus texanus*)** showing velvet on its newly growing antlers. The velvet will disappear as the antlers grow and harden in preparation for battles with other competing males during the late fall mating season.

## Nature's News of the Weird



**9 weirdest snakes in the world**

Right Click [HERE](#) & Open Link

## The Love Potion #9 of Nectars

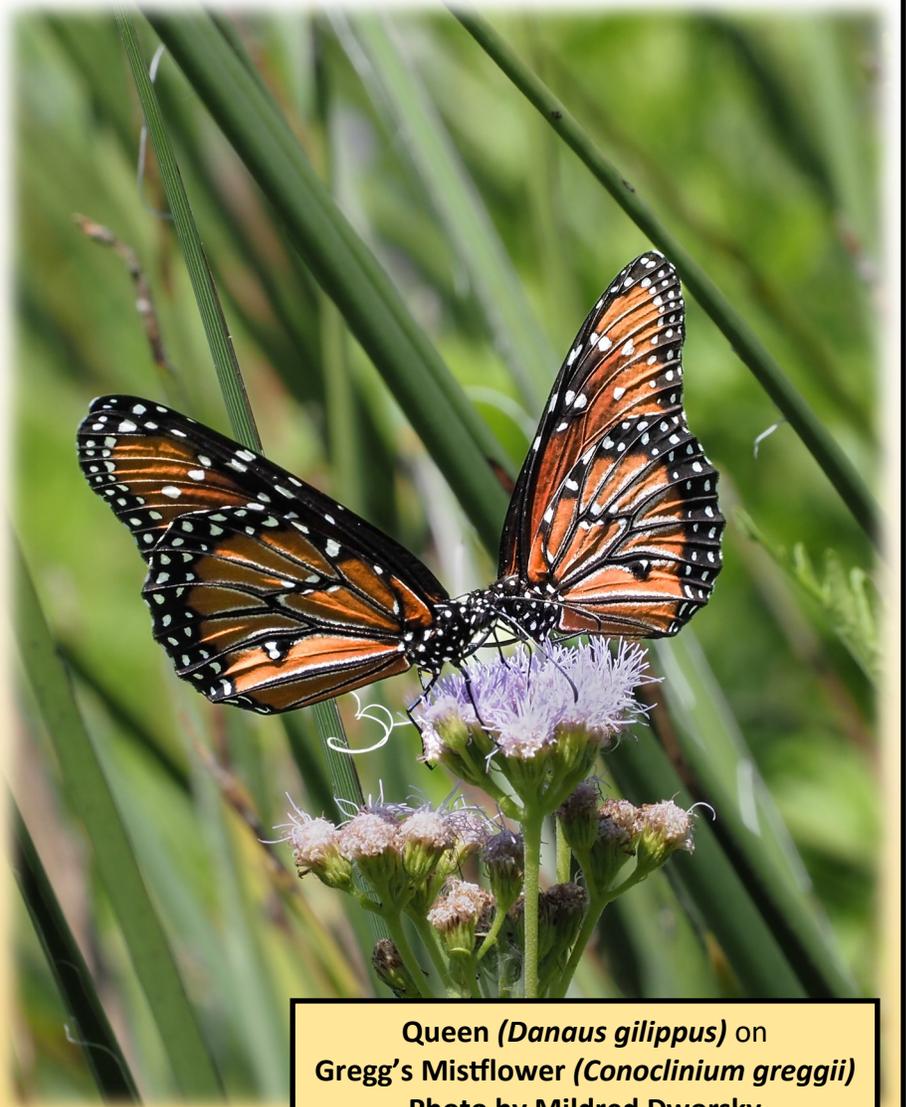
Most of us are familiar with the delightful scene of a cloud of Queen butterflies swarming over a sea of Blue Mistflower blooms. The obvious assumption suggests that its nectar must be butterfly ambrosia. The real secret of its attractiveness lies deeper in the aphrodisiac qualities generated by a sexual **pheromone** that Queens produce from a chemical component of the nectar. Sugar is nice, but sex is the more potent spice.

The term **pheromone** was first described in 1959 “for chemicals that enable members of the same species to communicate with each other.” They have mostly been associated with animals, and we are familiar with trail pheromones used by ants to mark trails, alarm pheromones employed to warn hives of attack, or sex pheromones that attract mates. Pheromones have been little studied in plants, but they are operative in the botanical world.

Blue Mistflower leaves & flowers produce an alkaloid toxin, intermedine, that poisons herbivores & deters grazing. Intermedine offers a second evolutionary benefit to the plant by raising the odds of pollination. Most of the observed Queen butterflies on the plant are males who are not only attracted to the nectar, but also unwittingly to the improved probability of mating. The males will ingest intermedine which their bodies will convert into a sexual pheromone that attracts females. When mating, a “nuptial gift” of a portion of the original toxin is passed to the female, which makes their eggs unpalatable to predators.

The **mutualistic** relationship seems motivated by a love of nectar, but has a survival story that runs much deeper. While the Queens love the Mistflower nectar, its power as a “love nectar” helps ensure the survival of the species.

Source: “Gregg Mistflower, the Queen Butterfly, and the nuptial gift” by Ray Conrow NPSOT Archive



Queen (*Danaus gilippus*) on Gregg's Mistflower (*Conoclinium greggii*)  
Photo by Mildred Dworsky

### Do butterflies kiss??

Scientists say no. They don't have lips. Their antenna get in the way. There is no evolutionary advantage.

What do scientists know about love?

## Pay Attention to those Native Grasses @ FNC!



**Eastern Gamma**  
*Tripsacum dactyloides*  
The red appendages are stamens.  
This species is the ice cream  
of grasses for grazers.

**Poaceae**, the grass family, consists of 12,000 species. They are flowering plants & are economically important as they include our cereal crops. Grasses are also essential to livestock production.

### Texas State Grass!



**Sideoats Gramma (*Bouteloua curtipendula*)**  
Photo by Gene Sturla

All photos by Lonnie Childs unless otherwise indicated.



**Inland Sea Oats**  
*(Chasmanthium latifolium)*  
At the Bird Blind



**Hairy Gramma (*Bouteloua hirsuta*)**  
The "stinger" on the seed head is distinctive.

As you hike the Live Oak Creek Wilderness down to the creek crossing, stop, look to the right, and then gaze upwards to the sky. You will be treated to the visage of a grand Bald Cypress tree, *Taxodium distichum*, the tallest tree species in the park and probably the Hill Country environment. Our proud specimen towers over the riparian area of Live Oak Creek and reigns as the arboreal royalty at FNC, although there are three larger specimens planted further up the creek near Pavilion #5.

Bald Cypress are a member of the *Cupressaceae* family of conifers which includes Junipers and Redwoods. It is a global family of 27-30 genera. *Taxodium distichum* (translating to “yew-like”, “two ranked” for its two rows of leaves) is native to the swampy or riparian areas of southern North America. Its common name derives from its deciduous habit of dropping its leaves early in autumn and not sprouting new ones until late spring. The names of two Texas rivers, the Sabine and Sabinal, drive from sabino, Spanish for cypress.

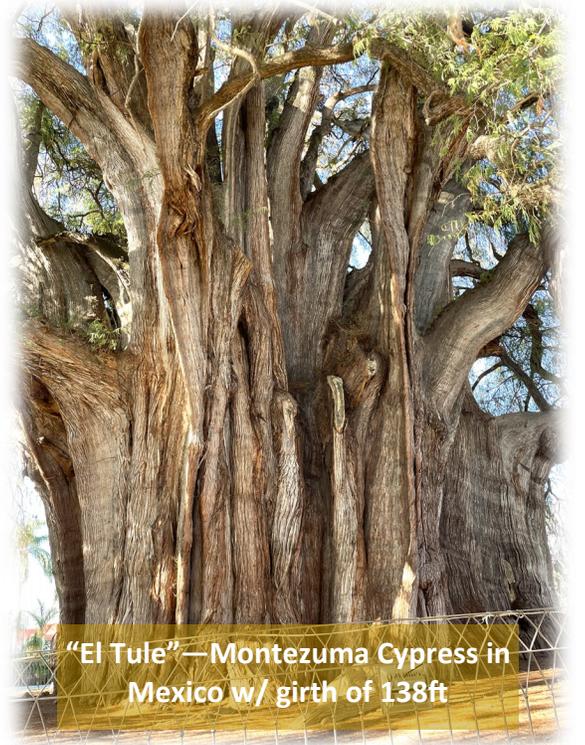
The **Pond Cypress** of southeastern US swamps is most often considered a sub-species of Bald Cypress, but some taxonomists classify it as a separate species (*Taxodium ascendens*). Far south Texas also hosts the more drought tolerant, but also riparian **Montezuma Cypress** (*Taxodium mucronata*) which most consider a separate species, but a few scientists also consider it as a sub-species of Bald Cypress.

Distribution: Gillespie County is on the northwestern edge of the distribution of this species in Texas. In the Hill Country, they inhabit the river and stream beds of the Balcones Canyonlands where they enjoy slightly cooler micro-climates, perhaps representing relict species of earlier, cooler Paleocene climates. From their presence along the Balcones Escarpment, you must travel 200 miles east to find their next geographic distribution in southeastern and eastern Texas along rivers and lining the man-made lakes around which they have colonized.

Characteristics: Bald Cypress are large, slow-growing, and long-lived arboreal species that can typically reach 50-100 feet tall with a crown that stretches 20-40 feet wide. The tallest known specimen in Virginia, is 145 ft tall, and the stoutest known specimen resides in Real County near Leakey with a circumference of 39 ft. Although most individuals live from 600-1200 years, there are two specimens in North Carolina and Florida that are



On Live Oak Creek



“El Tule”—Montezuma Cypress in Mexico w/ girth of 138ft

## Feature Story: *The Bald and Stately Cypress*

aged at about 2,700 years old. Scientists recently discovered a forest of Bald Cypress buried in an exposed sand bank underwater in the Gulf of Mexico off the Alabama coast and have determined it to be over 50,000 years old, which provides some rough idea of the age of the species. Bald Cypress are not only one of the largest of our Hill Country species, but they are ecological elder statesman with tales to tell.

Bald cypress trees inhabiting swamps may grow conical, woody projections from the root system which project above the ground or water and are referred to as “knees” (scientifically

known as pneumatophores). Their function was originally thought to be to provide oxygen to the roots when growing in the low dissolved oxygen waters of a swamp. The scientific evidence for this function is scant, and when swamp-dwelling specimens had their knees removed, they did not decrease in oxygen content and the trees continued to thrive. Another more likely function is structural support and stabilization in softer mud bottoms. Note that our central Texas specimens growing in rocky river beds do not typically grow knees but do grow massive above-ground root systems which are anchored in rock. My observation is that the scientific verdict for whether trees sport knees for stabilization or oxygen is still out for study and deliberation.

Cultural Uses: Since their natural habitat along waterways or in swamps and lakes involves suffering “wet feet”, their wood has evolved to be water-resistant resulting in a highly desirable species for constructing water-resistant structures. It also makes for a beautiful landscaping specimen in the right application with its stately form and rusty colored fall foliage.

Ecological Value: Aside from its beauty, the greatest value of Bald Cypress involves their ecological contributions as a keystone species in riparian and swamp habitats. It is the most effective stabilizer and defender of waterway banks as it diffuses and slows floodwaters, traps sediments as the precursor to building the soil bank along the waterway, and serves as a filter of pollutants. Bald Cypress provide habitat for many species including wild turkey, wood ducks, and squirrels. Their branches provide



Knees or Pneumatophores



Caddo Lake

## Feature Story: *The Bald and Stately Cypress*

nesting places for bald eagles and osprey. Rotting knees are used as nesting cavities by warblers. Many animals feed on the seeds contained in their cones. Fish use their underwater roots and submerged logs as hiding and spawning sites.

Next time that you are hiking down the trail, give our reigning Bald Cypress a respectful nod, enjoy its stately beauty, and appreciate the fact that it has been making huge contributions to the local ecology since long before we were here and will continue to do so for long after we depart this earth.

*Editor' Note: Today's sight of destroyed and flattened Cypress trees along the Guadalupe River saddens us as we had become accustomed to views of those iconic conifers. Not to despair, they will demonstrate resilience as they re-sprout from stumps and horizontal trees. Many of these trees were hundreds of years old and have survived more than one of these catastrophic floods. We will not see them return to their majesty in our lifetimes, but know that future generations will have that opportunity. Let's teach them to appreciate it.*



Honey Creek SNA



Guadalupe River by Gary Clark

**Bird Drawings & Photos**

**by Bill Lindemann**

In addition to founding FNC & FFNC, Bill was a geologist, birder, botanist, odontologist, writer, photographer, woodcarver, and artist. This feature showcases some of Bill's photos & attendant drawings. Many of us had the opportunity to enjoy field trips with Bill where the question was always asked many times.

***"What's this Bill?"***



**Ash-throated Flycatcher  
(*Myiarchus cinerascens*)**

Live in dry scrub, open woodlands, and deserts in the West. They eat mostly insects supplemented by small fruits from which they also harvest all of their water needs. They are secondary cavity nesters which refers to the fact that they must compete for cavities created by other birds or which are naturally created.

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/>



Find the latest news about FFNC at  
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Lonnie Childs, Newsletter Editor, at [lonniechilds@utexas.edu](mailto:lonniechilds@utexas.edu)