

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center

October, 2025 Volume 6 Number 10
<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

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Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

Remember those summer rains? Fond memories. Seasons turned inside out and mashed together. There is talk of how there once were four distinct seasons, but that is most probably a nostalgic notion. The delineation of seasonal milestones on the calendar serve as mere suggestions of how mankind would prefer that our weather behaves. Weather has its own patterns known only to it, but meteorologists keep trying. Just as they get close, weather moves the needle. Wait until my AI gets here! The Germans would call it "Das wetter" - an unintended pun? Stop wishing and complaining. The weather is not listening.

As we foresee the close of 2025, we have one final guided hike and a Star Party event to avail yourself. Please take advantage of these wonderful opportunities to become grounded in Nature's magnificence by either looking down or looking up. Gaze at the stars or take a hike! Either one will make you a better person or at least a happier one.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

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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

For more information, contact Lonnie Childs at

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.

Preserve Our Night Skies!

Join Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center for a

STAR PARTY IN THE PARK!

Brought to you by Star Party America and
Astronomer Eddie Hrnrcir

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25th
8:30 - 9:30 p.m. - Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park

Using a giant Meade LX 200 telescope, astronomer Eddie Hrnrcir will unlock the secrets of the night sky for all present at this star-studded celestial gathering. Highlights of the evening include Hrnrcir's demonstration of how to locate the historic landing site of NASA's Apollo 11 moon mission; major constellations such as the dramatic Scorpius and the archer Sagittarius, the balanced scales of Libra, the iconic Big and Little Dippers, the swan-like Cygnus, the triangular formation known as the Summer Triangle, and the mythic strongman Hercules. Alongside the constellations, several notable stars will be shining brightly. Vega, Deneb, and Altair—the three points of the Summer Triangle—will be visible, as will Albireo and Polaris, and the steadfast North Star. In addition to the star-studded spectacle, guests will have the rare thrill of viewing the planet Saturn. Often considered the jewel of our solar system, Saturn's rings are a breathtaking sight and a favorite among astronomers and newcomers alike. All you need to bring with you is your curiosity, a willingness to learn, a pair of binoculars to enhance your viewing experience, and perhaps a blanket or lawn chair for comfort.

Free to the public - Donations to FFNC are Accepted

October is Hill Country Night Sky Month!

**Help preserve it for future generations so that “twinkle, twinkle little star”
won't become a thing of the past.**

**For more information on how to preserve and enjoy our cosmic night
skies, go to the Hill Country Alliance website at**

<https://hillcountryalliance.org/events/night-sky-month/>

Our September Star Party was out of this World!

On September 27th, **Eddie Hrcir, planetary geologist of Star Party America** (<https://www.starpartyamerica.org/>), provided a view into the heavens for an audience at FNC. Hearing oohs and aahs confirmed the perspective that preserving our dark skies preserves our cosmic connections and stimulates emotional responses from humility to awe, all beneficial anti-dotes to our modern lifestyles. Put that screen down and look-up! Don't miss the October 25th repeat party.



The Goff family gets an astronomy lesson along with eye opening views of the Moon and Saturn.



Photo by Lena Goff

Hill Country Master Naturalist Class of 2025 Visits FNC

The 2025 class of Hill Country Master Naturalists (HCMN) visited FNC in September as part of their class curriculum. A class room session on September 17th focused on learning about important naturalists who explored Texas in the 19th and early 20th century. On September 20th, they returned for a guided hike of FNC trails led by Billy Guin and Lonnie Childs, a grass workshop presented by Beth McMahon with Texas Agrilife Extension, a lesson in Wildscaping by Kathy Saucier, and a presentation on being a Citizen Scientist. FFNC was honored to host the class and participate in the education of these future master naturalists. For more information on the Master Naturalist program, go to <https://txmn.org/hillcountry/>



Photos by:

Patti Guin

Dave Oelrich

Phil Stapleton

Turner Construction Volunteers @ FNC

Turner Construction of Austin recently spent a half day at FNC installing new steps along an eroded section of trail near the dam. Their great work ethic, service minded approach, and fun-loving attitude was much appreciated, and their work product demonstrates it.

FFNC invites local organizations & companies who want to perform public service work to contact Lonnie Childs at lonniechilds@utexas.edu.



Thanks Turner Construction!



Take a Hike!

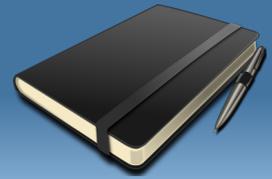


Photo by Phil Stapleton

Participants at our September guided hike at FNC led by Rebecca & Phil Stapleton. The last hike of 2025 will be October 18, but they will resume in the spring of 2026.

Nature Journaling—By Rebecca Stapleton, TMN

Welcome Autumn, Such As It Is!



This year the autumn equinox happens on September 22nd even though the temps feel more like summer. The date can vary a bit, sometimes occurring on the 23rd of September.

The word equinox comes from the Latin words *aequus* and *nox*. Equal and night! It refers to the amount of daylight and dark being of equal length or in balance with each other. Again, it can vary a little bit depending on what part of the country you live in.

Autumn brings on shorter days and longer nights. Shadows lengthen and the sky appears bluer. The mornings are brisk! Leaves put on their color show, before being released to fall to the ground and acorns crunch underfoot as you walk underneath the oaks.

For our little bit of Texas, autumn means a bumper crop of acorns! The American Beauty Berry is heavy with dark, purple berries that the backyard wildlife will get to enjoy. Maybe I can get just a few to taste? A few of our trees are teasing us with a tiny start of color but we know that in Texas the real show is November into December!

Surprise of surprises though! We have some lovely pumpkins ready to harvest soon, compliments of Wildseed Farm from last autumn and a hungry raccoon finding a spot along the fence to “plant the seeds”! Who knew how well gourds grow when left to their own devices? We’re thinking that we will try growing some for next autumn from this harvest of pumpkins! Not sure if we will be lucky enough to find another accommodating raccoon again! Happy Fall Ya’ll!

Welcome Autumn, Such As It Is!



Skipping Butterflies



When perusing for butterflies at the PG, your eye is mostly tuned to the larger showy species, only to be interrupted by smaller species that rapidly dart in erratic fashion across your field of vision. Allow yourself a patient moment, zoom in, and note these small, stout bodied butterflies with big heads and hooked antenna. You are looking at an aptly named **Skipper**—a member of the **Hesperiidae family**, part of the order Lepidoptera (Butterflies & Moths).

With 3500 species globally, the prevalent family numbers 200 in the US & Canada, which constitutes about 30% of our butterfly species. They are not only common but diverse & can be quite colorful.

Pay attention to those darting Skippers & be astonished! It will be worth the effort.

Above: *Lerema Accius*
Clouded Skipper

Larval host plants are grasses. Ranges from SE US to west Texas.

Right: *Atalopedes huron*
Huron Sachem

AKA, this “Grass Skipper” was designated as its own distinct species in 2022. The “sachem” designation derives from the Algonquian term for a supreme leader. Larval host plants are grasses. Ranges from SE US to Colorado & south to South America.



Photos by Phil Stapleton

Sacred Datura—the Thorn-apple

Datura wrightii, Sacred Datura, Thorn-apple, Jimsonweed

A poisonous perennial plant species in the family **Solanaceae** (**Nightshades**). It is native to the Southwestern United States & northwestern Mexico including Gillespie County & is often confused with its western cousin *D. stramonium* aka Jimsonweed. Like most Nightshades, it contains strong alkaloid compounds that can produce hallucinogenic effects that were utilized in ceremonies by Native peoples, thus the sacred designation. Other indigenous peoples used the plant as a narcotic or anesthetic for surgery. ALL parts of the plant are toxic to humans & animals. At this time, the flowers are spent but the seedpods known as Thorn-apples can be found.



Photos by Lonnie Childs

Cowpen Daisies Abound

If you have driven around the sandier areas of Gillespie County in the past month, you might have noticed thick, mini-fortresses of forbs with bounteous yellow blooms that were no doubt fortified by our periodic summer rains. They inhabit disturbed soils & bunch up under the protection of Oaks. These would be Cowpen Daisies aka Golden Crownbeards or Butter Daisies (*Verbesina encelioides*).

In addition to their prolonged bloom period, they provide ample nectar for butterflies & native bees, particularly important in the fall. By virtue of their abundance, it can be deduced that they have high deer resistance, although they can also be quite aggressive in their spread.

This plant was used by Native Peoples & early settlers to treat skin ailments.



Feature Story: *Fall Migration* by Bill Lindemann



*Re-printed from the October, 2020,
Fredericksburg Nature Notes*



Usually, the first cold front to make it into the Hill Country is a signal to our summer bird population that they need to prepare for the trip south. Some of our summer birds, like the Purple Martins, are already in South America, but most are still here trying to store some extra fat to burn on the long flight south.

Birders know that activity over the next two months will pick up and that a good surprise may be in the offing. During spring migration, the birds are heading for their breeding grounds and normally take the more direct route. In the fall, with breeding behind them, they may wander a little along the way.

A bird that chooses to wander about in the fall is the Rufous Hummingbird. It breeds in the northwestern part of the country, but frequently makes it into our area. Look for a rusty hummer with a bright orange throat that is very feisty around the feeder or flower bed.

The problem with fall birding is that many of the birds are rather drab after undergoing a post breeding season molt. The non-breeding plumage is generally not as colorful as in the breeding plumage. The second problem is that there are many immature birds that hatched over the summer months. These birds generally are drab or show only pale coloration.

So, to the birder in the fall, the operative word is "confusion." I doubt that very many birders that took up this pastime did so in the fall. Many of the bright colorful warblers that awe the birders in the spring look alike, and identification is most difficult. With drab color causing confusion, other more subtle traits like eye rings, wing bars, tail patterns, and bill features take on extra importance in identification.

As fall approaches, we will see and hear large flocks of Sandhill Cranes passing overhead in route to the coastal areas. We are not in the major geese flyways, but occasionally some will pass through. These large birds often fly in the characteristic "V" formation. The birds have learned that in such a formation, all of them except the leader, are flying in the slip stream of air from the bird ahead, which makes flying easier. If you watch these flocks, you will notice the lead bird will rotate out of the position as he tires.

Some birds will flock up prior to departing on their journey. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, swallows, some hawks, and shorebirds are prone to fly together rather than alone. Many of these birds will roost together at night and split up during the day while searching for food.

Keep the binoculars and bird books at the ready, because the fall migration show is about to begin. The birds might not be as easy to identify as in the spring, but most birders are looking for the challenge anyway. Be patient.

Although not a bird, another beautifully winged creature, the Monarch Butterfly, will soon be migrating through the Hill Country. The Monarchs will be flying south to their wintering grounds in the Sierra Madres in Mexico. Coincidental with the bird migration, these butterflies do add color as they waft along on the breezes. The Monarch is a large rusty-colored butterfly with heavy dark veins and white spots in their wings.

Fall Migration

What is migration?

Migration is the cyclic or periodic travel of an animal as it returns eventually to its original place of departure. Migration is often annual and is closely linked with the cyclic pattern of the seasons.

Why do birds migrate?

There are a number of explanations for migration. Birds migrate to: (1) areas where food is more abundant, (2) there is less competition for nesting space, (3) the climate is milder, or (4) the daylight hours are longer (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department).

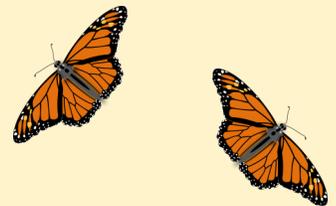
For more information on Bird Migration, check out:

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/birding/migration/faq/>

Fall Migration Events to Look for in October:

- **Canada Geese**—Flying south in V formations until late October
- **Sandhill Cranes**—Flying south in V formation. Can be distinguished from Geese by the long legs trailing behind them. Migration period is the 2nd half of October into early November. At least one population winters in northeastern Gillespie County.
- **Hawk Kettles**—Mostly Swainson Hawks fly through, which are large bodied & broad-winged. In late October to early November, large numbers of hawks can be seen drifting south on northerly winds until they hit a thermal updraft at which point they will soar upwards in a circular motion to gain elevation & then begin drifting south again. You can occasionally catch them roosting on the ground overnight in fields where they will feast on grasshoppers.
- **Monarch Butterflies** are passing through now!

**Venture out to our Bird Blind for the chance to see
an unusual migrant taking a break!**



Nature's News of the Weird

Find out about the "Gruejay" in San Antonio
Right Click [HERE](#) & Open HyperLink

In Closing...



House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Photo by Phil Stapleton

House Sparrows, native to Europe & Asia, were introduced into New York in 1851 by Nicholas Pike, Director of the Brooklyn Institute, to combat cankerworm pests & to please recent home-sick European immigrants. More were released over the years, and by 1910, they had reached California, establishing themselves as agricultural & environmental pests along the way.

House Sparrows proved to be premier invaders. They adapt to a variety of environments from grasslands to forests to urban areas. They especially prefer residing near humans—wonder why? They reproduce & grow rapidly and are aggressive competitors. They eat at Sonic, drive out your Purple Martins, and sing raucously, mimicking humans. But you probably know that already. How can you miss them?

House Sparrow

Obnoxious neighbor.

Invited guest turned pest.

Doing your Darwinian best.

Fait accompli.

Are you to blame?

Who sent the invitation?

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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