

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center

November, 2025 Volume 6 Number 11

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

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Editor's Musings: **Lonnie Childs**

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

By meteorological and temporal calculations, November should represent that we are well into autumn falling into winter. And yet, temperatures have hovered in the mid 80s during the days, and my Post Oaks have stingily hung onto their leaves, only now letting go. The rows of flame-leaf sumac lining our roadways offer some nice yellows, and I am fortunate to host a few Black Hickories that have turned majestic gold. Reports are that the fall display at Lost Maples State Park is finally arriving, but you should hurry there now. The year 2025 might be known for its fall shortfall.

I went in search of a good autumn quote and found a dearth of personal inspiration. Albert Camus, the French existentialist of all people, waxed that, "*Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower.*" I suppose that might be true in the northeast with their brilliant sylvan displays of fall color, and with the winters New Englanders suffer, they deserve spectacular arboreal demonstrations. With some early fall rains, we fortuitously sometimes enjoy a floral "second spring" in central Texas with native flowers blooming in September and October. I greedily will take the floral version of a second spring. Perhaps, we also deserve that, because we suffer much harsher summers. Either way, it appears a good autumn is to be earned.

One final quote from Mister or Miss Unknown proffered that, "*Autumn shows us how beautiful it is to let things go.*" Hmm, really? I have internalized that autumn and winter are the necessary price that life pays in order to have spring. It's an essential part of the circle of life. I am just not an autumn person, but I am working on it.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

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Note: There will be no December newsletter. See you in January.

Have a Happy Thanksgiving!





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.





Season's Greetings!

As the seasons turn and the world transforms, may you find joy in the gentle rhythm of nature. Just as trees shed their leaves to embrace new beginnings, may you welcome change with hope and courage.

May the crisp winter air invigorate your spirit and the promise of spring inspire renewal.

Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center



*With gratitude to our
Supporters & Volunteers.*

Tree Planting Time



Photo by Mary Ellen Terrell



Photos by Lonnie Childs except where noted

Tis' the season for planting native trees and shrubs, so our dedicated corps of FFNC volunteers did just that on November 18. We planted an array of mostly small ornamental and understory trees and shrubs along the trail just west of the entrance kiosk.

The selection of thirteen trees and shrubs included Texas Redbud, Carolina Buckthorn, Escarpment Black Cherry, Mexican Buckeye, Fragrant Mimosa, Golden Ball Leadtree, Mountain Laurel, Eve's Necklace, Sotol, and Possumhaw. The intent is to provide color and interest along the trail, screen off sections of the trail, add to the biodiversity of the nature center, and provide hikers with some choices for species to plant in their own landscape.

With our ever rapacious deer herd, we found it necessary to cage the specimens until they grow to sufficient size.

The open area adjacent to the trail is a pocket prairie restoration in progress. We have contouring and some erosion control features to be installed prior to the seeding of additional grass and forb species in the spring. Our goal is to help Mother Nature along to greater health, and she will return the favor with her beauty for us to enjoy.



L to R. Zach Gibler, Jackie Gibler, Scott Loveland, Billy Guin, Phil Youngblood, Trudy Eberhardt, Frank Garcia. Not pictured were Mary Ellen Terrell, Carl Luckenbach, & Dave Oelrich.

Thanks to **Friendly Natives Nursery** of Fredericksburg for their donation of an Escarpment Black Cherry tree. Visit their nursery for an excellent selection of native plants and trees. Also, kudos to **Jonathon Watt**, tree grower extraordinaire & volunteer, for donating some of his home grown trees.

More Volunteers at Work

FFNC volunteers began work on another habitat restoration project on a denuded hillside along the trail. It serves to demonstrate an example of the ecological battleground of the Hill Country. Will the Juniper (Cedar) move into the open space and win or will grasses/forbs prevail. In this case, the Juniper habitat has provided an ecological service by holding up the hillside and preventing erosion. Unless a fire intervenes, it will likely dominate the hillside in future years, which would be beneficial and hard to admit if you grew up hating Juniper as many have.

The other ecological option is to stage an intervention which we are doing. In place of fire, our volun-



Carl Luckenbach, Trudy Eberhardt, & Billy Guin



Photos by Lonnie Childs

teers recently cleared out dead limbs and clipped emerging Juniper saplings. The slash was laid on the hillside to mitigate erosion. We will seed with grass and other species in the spring, protected by the slash laid on the hillside. We will continue to have to periodically assume the role of fire and lop the Juniper seedlings to control their spread. In this case, we made an ecological choice of grassland over cedar brake. We'll see how it evolves. If Juniper wins out in the end, that will be ok too. The hillside needs some cover either way.

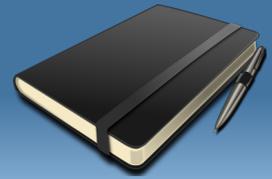
Many thanks go to **Wild Birds Unlimited of Kerrville** and the **Nature Shoppe** of Fredericksburg for their donation of bird seed to keep our feeders full and avian denizens happy.



WILD BIRD SEED • FEEDERS • NATURE GIFTS



Let's Talk Turkey!



There are four main species of wild turkey in North America - the Eastern, Osceola, Merriam's and our very own, the Rio Grande, here in Texas. Rio Grande wild turkeys have copper and bronze tip feathers - 5,000 to 6,000 feathers, just to give them a number! The males, known as Toms, are larger and more colorful than the females. Hens have a fleshy wattle or snood that hangs from the top of the beak. Tom's also have an impressive fan of tail feathers that they spread to show dominance over other males and to attract females.

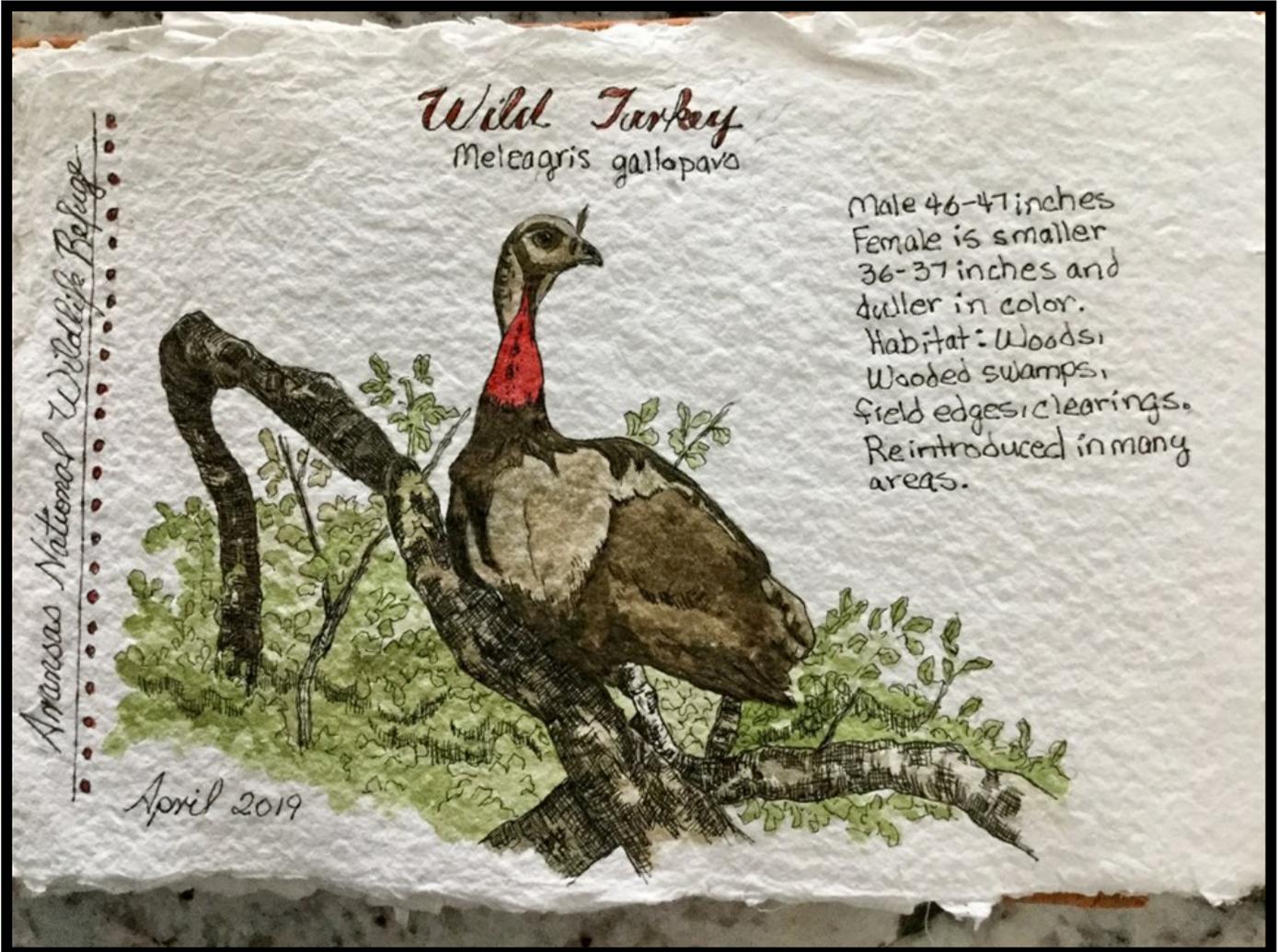
Wild turkeys can fly short distances at up to 50 miles per hour and can run as fast as 18 miles per hour. They can even swim the span of a river by tucking in their wings, spreading their tail and kicking! Domestic turkeys do not usually have the ability to swim. They can recognize individual human faces and voices, have very good memories, and excellent vision with the ability to see in color, making it easy for them to distinguish predators from a distance. In short, wild turkeys are super smart birds!

Wild turkey mating season is March - June with the Toms puffing out their feathers and spreading their tail fans, strutting to impress and attract hens along with warding off the competition for her affection. In late March up to early April, hens will lay up to 15 eggs in ground nests located at the edges of woods or fields, concealing them while giving them a clear view of the surroundings and of predators. Eggs are incubated for about 28 days with the poults hatching at almost the same moment. This is called synchronous hatching. Hens stay with their poults for up to 6 months, protecting them from the elements and predators, teaching them to find food and how to survive on their own.

Wild turkeys are omnivores, eating nuts, berries, acorns, fruits, buds, leaves, insects, seeds and grains, as well as small vertebrates such as snakes, lizards and frogs. At night, they roost high on the branches of trees but will sometimes choose man-made structures to protect themselves from predators.

Centuries ago, indigenous people domesticated wild turkeys. In the early 1500's, European explorers brought turkeys from Mexico back with them to Europe. Later, English colonists brought domesticated turkeys with them to North America. In the early 20th century, wild turkeys were hunted to near extinction, but efforts were made in the 1940's to increase the population. Wild turkeys made a comeback spreading to all the lower 48 states! There are now around 7 million wild turkeys across North America with around 600,000 of them in our state of Texas!

Let's Talk Turkey!



Nature Journal Art ~ Rebecca Stapleton

Nature's News of the Weird



Nikon Comedy Wildlife Award Photos

Right Click [HERE](#) & Open HyperLink

Osprey—"The Bird of Prey"



Photo by Bill Lindemann

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

aka Sea Hawk, River Hawk, or Fish Hawk

The **Osprey** is a diurnal, fish-eating predator & is the only raptor that hovers over water & plunges feet-first into water when hunting. It has a cosmopolitan distribution, inhabiting all continents except Antarctica, while also surviving in a variety of habitats as long as they include a body of water.

This large raptor (wingspan up to 71") exists almost exclusively on fish, which explains why its evolutionary history includes the advancement of specialized physical characteristics & unique behaviors that optimize its fluviatile hunting skills. For example, their outer toe is reversible, allowing them to grasp their prey with two toes in front & two behind. This feature is advantageous when they grab slippery fish.

We generally have an Osprey(s) visit yearly at FNC during migration or as part of their winter range.



Photo by Dot Maginot



Photo by Bill Lindemann

To watch a video by Charles Metzger of an **Osprey** chomping on a fish at FNC, Right Click [HERE](#) & Open Hyperlink.

To listen to Osprey sounds, Right Click [HERE](#) & Open Hyperlink.

Migrant Monarchs Take a Break

The 2025 Monarch butterfly migration through Texas is underway, although it appears to be a couple of weeks behind the normal schedule when migration numbers peak in mid-October. Experts speculate that the migration has been delayed by challenging conditions like strong southerly winds and heat. Reportedly, some butterflies are "dropping out" and breeding locally instead of continuing to Mexico. Population numbers reached record low levels in the winter of 2023, demonstrated a significant increase in 2024, but are still at record lows.



Winter Migration Pathways

What can you do to help preserve this remarkable migration event?

Become a Monarch Waystation

Go to Monarch Watch to learn more at <https://www.monarchwatch.org/>



In early November, this swarm of Monarchs roosted on the property of Patti & Billy Guin north of Fredericksburg. Watch a video of the flutter in action. Thanks for sharing!

Right Click [HERE](#) & Open Hyperlink.

Photo & Video by Patti Guin

Another Resting Migrant



Photo by Lonnie Childs

The last month has presented opportunities for viewing migrant birds in passage—kettles of soaring hawks, high flying v-formations of Sandhills that you hear even if you cannot see them, and unique warblers at your water feature. This **Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*)** stopped by to roost in my backyard for a day, seemingly needing a rest, since he ignored my presence. Survival rates for young raptors are quite low as they struggle to develop their hunting skills.

Red-shouldered Hawks are Buteos—larger, thick-set hawks with broad wings that can often be seen soaring. Red-shouldered Hawks are unique in that they not only can soar, but they also flap their wings rapidly and glide underneath the forest canopy, similar to an accipiter such as Cooper’s Hawk. These dual techniques allow for effortless migration combined with flying skills that support its hunting skills as a “forest hawk.”

As forest raptors, they inhabit forest habitats with open sub-canopies and feed on small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and an occasional bird. They aggressively defend their territories and can often be found in battle with Great Horned Owls and Crows, as they raid each others nests and poach their adversaries’ young.

Source: allaboutbirds.org

Our Resident Heron



Our year-round **Great Blue Heron (*Ardea Herodias*)** provides ample opportunities to view its unique behaviors. Its capacity for patience as it deliberately stalks its aquatic lunch is most impressive. Finally, as the drama builds, its specially shaped neck vertebrae, enable it to quickly strike prey at a distance.



Photos by Phil Stapleton

Flutterin' at the Pollinator Garten



Leave those Leaves!

From Upper Left & then Clockwise

Dainty Sulphur (*Nathalis iole*)

Orange Sulphur (*Colias eurytheme*)

Bordered Patch (*Chlosyne lacinia*)

Phaon Crescent (*Phyciodes phaon*)

Gulf Fritillary (*Dione vanillae*)

If they don't migrate, where do butterflies go in winter? They may hibernate in a dormant state as an egg, larva, pupa, or adult in sheltered spots like hollow trees, log piles, dense vegetation like thick bunch grasses, or leaves.



Photos by Phil Stapleton



The Western Honeybee



Photo by Phil Stapleton

The **Western Honey Bee or European honey bee (*Apis mellifera*)** is the most common of the 7–12 species of honey bees worldwide and with the help of humans, it now occupies all continents except Antarctica. It's Latin Name translates to the "honey-bearing bee". From their origins in Africa or Asia, their ability to adapt to many different habitats enabled their geographic spread. The Western Honey Bee represents one of the earliest domesticated insects and is the primary species nurtured by beekeepers for both its honey production and pollination activities.

Western Honeybees are considered to be **Eusocial** which is the highest level of organization of sociality. It is defined by the following characteristics: 1) cooperative brood care; 2) overlapping generations within a colony of adults, and 3) a division of labor into reproductive and non-reproductive groups. They are also recognized for their complex communication methods exemplified by their dancing routines that convey to the hive members where/how far to sources of honey or nectar.

Honeybees are needed to pollinate 90 commercially grown crops, including numerous fruits, nuts, and vegetables. The economic, ecological, and cultural importance of western honeybees is significant.

Source: Wikipedia

Feature Story: *Sacred Datura* by Lonnie Childs

Datura wrightii is a plant with many colorful common names, presents a striking white flower that stands as one of our largest native wildflowers, was used as an hallucinogen by native peoples, literally stimulated an interesting historical episode, and is toxic enough to kill you. Other than that, it is a non-descript plant of little interest!

First, a bit about the scientific and common names of which there are many. *Datura* probably derives from a Hindi and ultimately Sanskrit term *dhatura* which means “white thorn-apple”, referring to the appearance of its seedpod. The species name honors Charles Wright, a renowned botanist, who collected in Texas from 1837-1852. The “sacred” notation originates from its use as an hallucinogen in religious ceremonies by many different native peoples across the southwestern US and in northern Mexico. Another name, “Sacred Thorn-apple”, combines the two terms. Angel Trumpet plays stems from its trumpet shaped flower. Finally, the odd name of “Jimsonweed” originates from the name “Jamestown Weed”, referring to a 1676 historical event in Jamestown, Va., whereby British soldiers stationed there to quell a rebellion ingested *Datura stramonium* and suffered 11 days of delirium and bizarre behavior.



Daturas are members of the Solanaceae family, often referred to as the Potato or Nightshade family which oddly also includes many of our edible vegetables – potatoes, eggplant, tomatoes, and peppers. This botanical family is a medicine chest of complex alkaloid chemicals which can provide hallucinogenic, narcotic, anesthetic, and fatal effects. Native peoples learned how to process the plants to avoid the fatal effects while utilizing the other effects for medicinal and spiritual benefits. Please note that all parts of our native *Datura* plant, particularly the roots and seedpods, are toxic to humans, livestock, and pets.



Datura flower bud

Description: *D. wrightii* is an impressive perennial herb that grows to 5-6 feet tall. Its large leaves are broad and rounded at the base, tapering to a point, often with wavy margins, and exhibit dark green grayish coloration, whitish veins, and a velvety touch.

The most striking feature of the plant are its white trumpet shaped flowers which grow to 6-7 inches long

Feature Story: *Sacred Datura*

and 5 inches at the opening and resemble the other Angel Trumpets (*Brugmansia* sp.) which is a common ornamental sold in nurseries. The blooms burst out in mass from May through October projecting upward to the sky. In clear weather, flowers open in the morning and evening and close during the heat of the day depending on water availability. The flowers metamorphose into a spiny globular capsule (e.g. thorn-apple) which contain the seeds.



Growing conditions: *Datura* grows in the wild in open disturbed land, along roadsides with well-drained (sandy) soils and in open floodplains. It prefers sandy, gravelly soil, well-drained loam, sand, or even clay. It takes full sun to part shade, preferring late afternoon shade from our summer sun. One plant in your landscape will likely result in more as it readily seeds out. A moderate water supply will satisfy its needs and keep it from being wilted.

Distribution of *D. wrightii* runs from southern California to central Texas and south into Mexico. It can be found growing in the wild in Gillespie County, particularly in the Pedernales Valley or areas with sandy soils.

The primary wildlife value is as a larval host plant for Carolina Sphinx Moths, *Manduca sexta* aka Hawkmoths, which are the primary pollinator for the species. Few other species can access its nectar due to the large trumpet shaped flowers. In the evening hours, blooming plants provide a venue for a Sphinx Moth show as they visit their favorite nectar bar. *Datura* exhibits high deer resistance due to its toxicity.

Ornamental value? *Datura* does present itself as a showy forb with its impressive vegetative appearance and becomes a real showstopper when its white flowers trumpet to the sky. I avoided putting it in my landscape for years due to its toxicity. Now that I have no pets, I placed one on a xeric berm surrounded by Agaves and Cacti making it unlikely to be reached by anyone except a foolish gardener like me. I enjoy the plant very much, especially set against a backdrop of dry land plants. It certainly is not a landscape for everyone, and if you decide to use it, consider the risks for pets and children and how to mitigate them before creating a planting plan.



Seedpod aka Thorn-apple

In Closing—Northern Lights in Texas?!

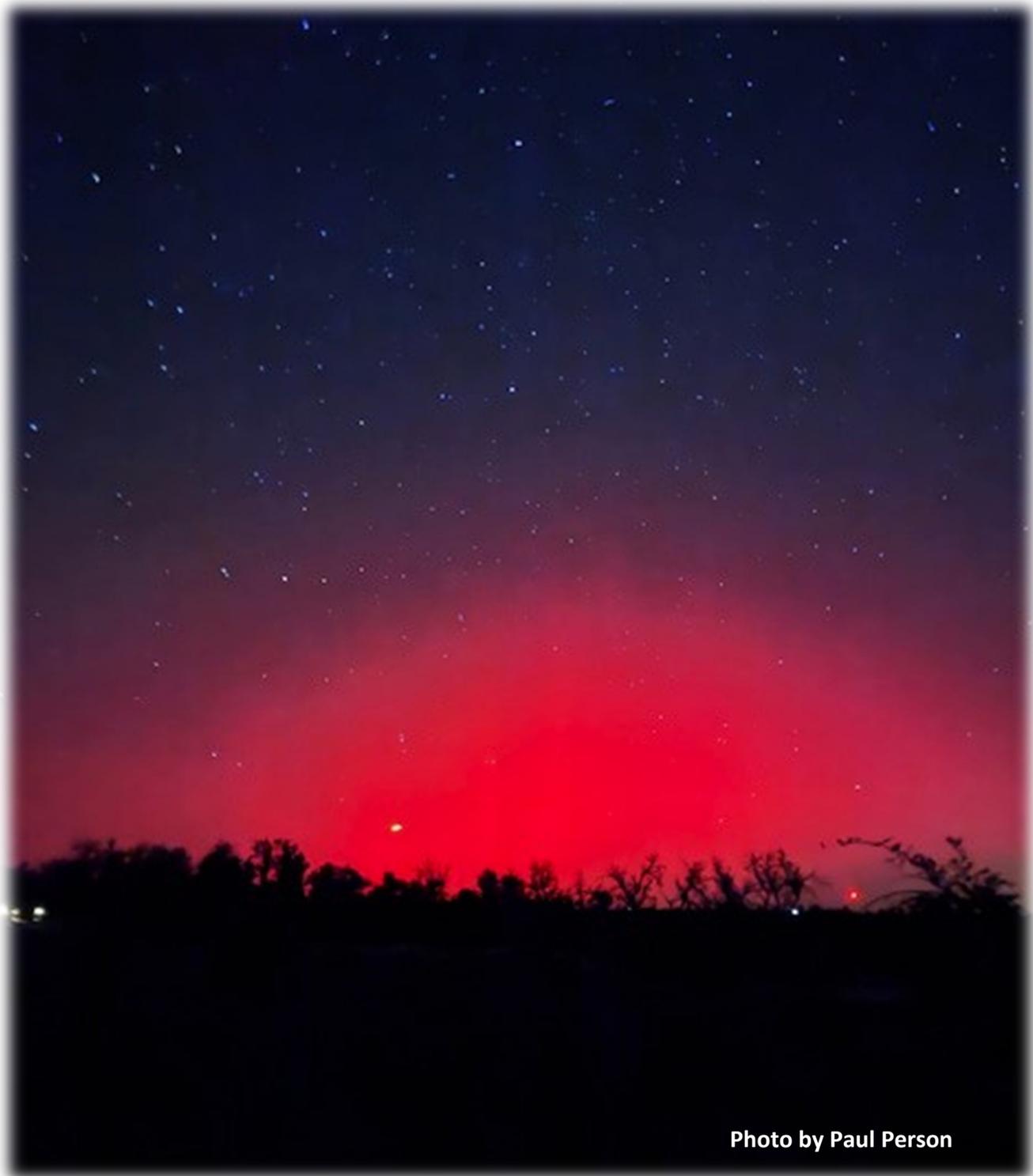


Photo by Paul Person

On November 11, Paul Person captured this once in a lifetime image of the Northern Lights viewable from his home northwest of Fredericksburg. How could this happen? A strong solar flare or coronal mass ejection (CME) sent a burst of charged particles toward Earth which collided in our atmosphere with a severe geomagnetic storm producing a dramatic occurrence of the Northern Lights which could be seen further south than is typical.

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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