

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center

February, 2026 Volume 7 Number 2
<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

Facebook@fredericksburgnaturecenter

Editor's Musings: Lonnie Childs

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

As the new year settles into February, your resolutions have usually either flown the coop or you are committed. Perhaps there is a third state of resolution purgatory where you still hope to salvage some level of accomplishment but cannot escape the inertia of good intent. If you read our annual report, you will know that the success of our organization depends on the volunteerism and financial support of the community. You may have nurtured the thought that I should become a member or send a donation to FFNC this year, because the accomplishment of their mission is an important cause. But it's now February, the month where resolutions go to die. Hark the herald, there is still time to cast off the chains of inertia and fulfill that resolution to support our cause. Go to the last page, click on that link, and join or donate. Do it now!

Under the volunteerism heading, see the page about the resurrection of Nature Explorers day (formerly known as 3rd Grade Day). In May, we will host 200+ FISC third graders for a day of discovery at FNC where they will enjoy presentations and a hike all designed to pique their love of nature. We are ecstatic to revive this signature program, and your financial contributions or volunteerism are welcome.

Finally, our first adult workshop of the year kicks off with "Migration, Monitoring, and Milkweed—A Monarch Butterfly Conservation Workshop." Become an active participant in the effort to save Monarchs.

Happy Nature Trails!

Lonnie

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Happy
Valentine's
Day!



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 9:00am—11:00am .

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.





OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

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

Calling for Volunteers to help with

Nature Explorers Day

A Day of Discovery at Fredericksburg Nature Center

(formerly known as 3rd Grade Day)

Our signature educational program is back with a new name and exciting learning opportunities designed to create the land stewards of tomorrow. On May 8th, 2026, FFNC will host approximately 215 Fredericksburg third graders for a day of nature discovery at FNC. Volunteers are needed from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm to help with a variety of activities. There will be multiple nature stations set up, with each station focused on a topic such as birds, wildflowers, butterflies, insects, and more. These sessions will be led by Texas Master Naturalists or subject matter experts. The day will also include rotating group nature hikes, and it will conclude with a raptor show by **Last Chance Forever**.

Volunteer roles include:

- Assisting presenters with setup and/or takedown
- Providing speaker support and backup (5-6 people)
- Helping lead groups during nature hikes (need 4 to 5 people)
- Directing classes to various stations (need 2 to 3 people)

We promise a fun filled and rewarding day that will be repaid by the looks of amazement and awe revealed in those 3rd graders' eyes!

To volunteer, please contact: Nancy Person at nancykperson@gmail.com



Our Volunteers are Priceless!



Steve Mckenzie & Gordon Downey defeated that pile of mulch with shovels & smiles.



Doing early Spring cleaning at the Pollinator Garden are L to R:
Gracie Waggener, Nancy Person (seated), Deb Youngblood, Laura Grant, Jackie Gibler, & Scott Loveland

Photo by Lonnie Childs



Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center Presents

Migration, Monitoring, and Milkweed

A Monarch Butterfly Conservation Workshop



The annual migration of monarch butterflies is among nature's most remarkable wonders. Every year, countless orange and black monarchs travel over several generations from Canada and the United States to their wintering sites in Mexico. Along the way, the Texas Hill Country offers vital habitat during both autumn and spring migrations. Unfortunately, monarch numbers have dropped sharply in recent decades due mainly to habitat loss, pesticide use, climate shifts, and especially the destruction of milkweed—the only food source for monarch caterpillars.

On Saturday, February 28, 2026, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center will host a training program titled “Migration, Monitoring, and Milkweed - A Monarch Conservation Workshop” at the AgriLife Extension Building, 38 Business Court, Fredericksburg. This event aims to empower participants with knowledge and practical tools for monarch conservation. Participants will learn how to track monarchs, how to monitor and report data, what plants to grow to support the butterflies during their migration, and how to propagate and grow milkweed.

Presenters include Carla Stang, Sarah Hilburn, Maura Windlinger, and Gracie Waggener—all experienced Texas Master Naturalists who have been involved for many years in monarch research, tagging, and milkweed propagation. At the end of the workshop, attendees will leave with hands-on skills for use at home or in their communities, plus resources and information to join ongoing monitoring projects or start one themselves.

This free public workshop requires RSVP by emailing Gracie Waggener at gwaggener@flow-apps.com. A \$10 donation is suggested to offset the cost of materials. There will be a short lunch break from 12:00 to 12:30, so participants are encouraged to bring a sack lunch. Coffee, hot tea, and water will be provided. This workshop has also been approved for 4.5 hours of Texas Master Naturalist advanced training.

Monarch Menagerie by Lonnie Childs



Learn more about Monarch Conservation efforts at <https://www.monarchwatch.org/>

Geology Exhibit Gets a Makeover

Our Geology Exhibit near the Entrance Kiosk recently received a redo from Board member, **Trudy Eberhardt**. The exhibit contains rock boulders representing most of the geologic formations that are resident in Gillespie County. Labels for each sample include the formation name and geologic era from which they were formed. Accompanying the rock samples is an information kiosk that will educate on various topics relevant to local geology. Gillespie County is fortunate to include the southern boundary of the **Llano Uplift**, which contains exposures of some of the oldest geologic formations in North America. Learn about “Deep Time” or geological time— the concept of immense Earth history spanning 4.54 billion years.



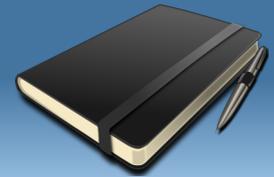
Experience some
Deep Time on your
next hike.

Thanks Trudy!

Photos by Lonnie Childs

Nature Journaling—By Rebecca Stapleton, TMN

A Look at Live Oak Creek



Live Oak Creek in Fredericksburg is a “live water” ecosystem. Its clear water, flowing over limestone and sandstone, is fed by natural springs and seeps in the Pecan Springs area and ultimately pours into the Pedernales River near the park. It offers a beautiful place for nature journaling!

The term “live water” means that the creek flows year-round, offering a steady, permanent flow of water and making it a vital water source during periods of long drought for wildlife and humans. Because it is sourced from groundwater—and is therefore shielded from surface air temperatures, Live Oak Creek maintains a cooler temperature for much of its course.

Healthy creeks support a diverse ecosystem - the plants and wildlife living in balance with each other which provides resiliency. Healthy creeks flow freely and have thriving stream beds and banks populated with vegetation. During heavy flooding, such as the one experienced in July, 2025, bank erosion generally occurs in places where the bank vegetation has been mowed or “cleaned up”, thus further damaging the riparian zone. Healthy riparian areas hold the existing soil bank and trap new silt which adds to the stream bank. The silt covers some existing vegetation and fish eggs and has a temporary negative impact on its riparian habitat and wildlife. However, flooding also replenishes water supplies and restores much needed nutrients to the creek and the creek banks.

Flooding is part of the normal cycle of waterways and will generally benefit healthy riparian areas which are resilient while further degrading unhealthy zones.



Live Oak Creek
Photo by Rebecca Stapleton



Live Oak Creek after July, 2025, flood
Photo by Lonnie Childs

How do they survive it?

During the recent ice storm & Uri in 2021, I observed soft stemmed herbaceous plants such as Bluebonnets encased in ice & shriveled as if on the verge of death. And yet post thaw, they spring back to life in full form. How do they do it? There are a variety of evolved strategies which include: 1) Using an **ice-binding protein** which acts as anti-freeze; 2) Containing **high levels of sugars** which protect against ice; 3) **Supercooling** tissues below freezing without freezing; 4) Developing **anatomical ice barriers** to keep ice out of the tender

parts; & most commonly, 5) **Extraorgan freezing** where the organ tissue cells dehydrate pushing their water into intracellular spaces where it can freeze without damaging critical tissue.



Large Buttercup *Ranunculus macranthus*



Red Columbine *Aquilegia canadensis*



Photos by Lonnie Childs

The Ospreys Return



Photo by Joe Arizola 2026

We have had an **Osprey(s) (*Pandion haliaetus*)** regularly wintering on Live Oak Creek for at least nine years (they live 15-20 years). Two were sighted recently in 2026. The photo above was taken recently while Dot Maginot caught the diving sequence below in October, 2023.

Some cool Osprey facts:

- The only raptor that hovers over water & plunges into the water feet-first to capture its aquatic prey. They spy fish from as high as 131' in the sky.
- One of only 6 land bird species found on every continent besides Antarctica.
- In North America, they breed in summer habitat in the northern Rockies, Canada, & along the eastern US. We are on the northern edge of their winter range.
- Have evolutionary adaptations to their feet which make them superb fishers with fish comprising 99% of their diet.
- They fly with stiff wingbeats in a steady, rowing motion that is recognizable. Look for them in the lake area above the dam.



Photos by Dot Maginot



Recent Friends at the Bird Blind

Orange-crowned Warbler

Leiothlypis celata



Lesser Goldfinch Female & Male

Spinus psaltria



Yellow-rumped Warbler

Setophaga coronata



Bewick's Wren

Thryomanes bewickii



Headline:

Juniper's Evolutionary Attempt at Human Pollination Goes Awry!

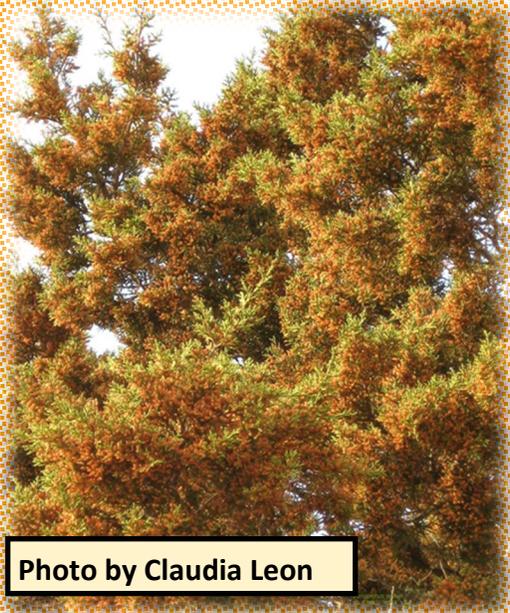


Photo by Claudia Leon



Photo by Lonnie Childs



Pollen Grain courtesy of Science Photo Library



Hill Country Haiku

*Achoo! Cough! Scratchhh,
Nose run, Eye burn, Brain fogging.
Loathed Cedar revenge.*

Beware—Juniper pollen facts that will induce allergy symptoms upon reading.

- ◆ Largest populations of mountain cedar can be found on slopes of Edwards Plateau in central Texas
- ◆ Pollen density = 400,000 pollen grains per male cone & 500 billion pollen grains per tree
- ◆ Hourly concentrations higher than 40,000 pollen grains/m³ were reported for Austin & Junction, Texas
- ◆ Pollen are mainly released into the air from mid or late December into February in morning hours

Indoor Pollen Concentrations of Mountain Cedar (Juniperus ashei) during Rainy Episodes in Austin, Texas;

Feature Story: Return of the Purple Martins by Lonnie Childs

The first members of our **Purple Martin (*Progne subis*)** colony will return soon after weeks of flying almost 4,000 miles from the savannas and open fields of South America. A sighting was reported in Kerrville on February 11, and there has been one report of a super-achieving or confused Martin arriving south-east of Dallas on December 24, 2025! Despite the term "scout" being applied to the first returning Purple Martins, they are actually the older adults returning to areas where they nested previously. To sustain themselves during the long flight, Martins evolved the ability to both drink & eat while in flight.

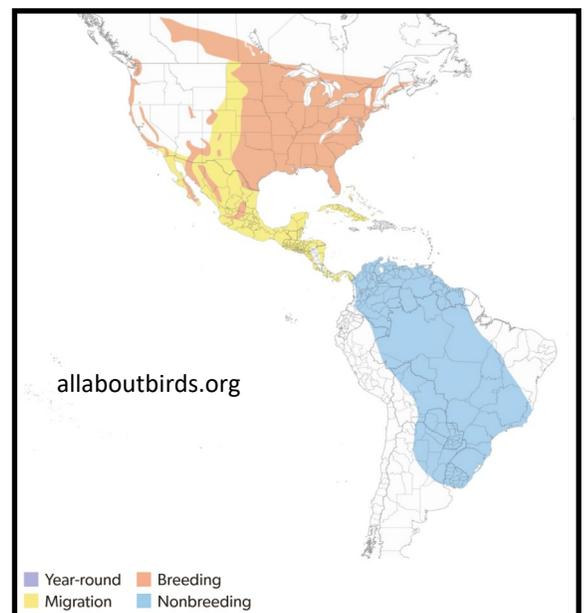


These Swallow family members have enjoyed a long relationship with humans in North America. Native Americans hung up gourds in which the birds could nest. In eastern North America, they historically bred along forest edges and rivers in cavities excavated by woodpeckers. Today, they almost exclusively nest in houses or gourds supplied by humans in urban areas. Western Martins still tough it out in woodpecker cavities in mountain forests or Pacific lowlands.

These insectivores forage over towns, cities, parks, open fields, dunes, streams, wet meadows, beaver ponds, and other open areas. They feed exclusively in the air at higher altitudes often above 150 ft and occasionally as high as 500 ft. When encountering their prey, they perform an acrobatic move and then flare their tails for assistance in trapping the insect. Their list of insect prey includes a diverse list of the usual suspects. Martins must ingest small bits of gravel to help them digest insect exoskeletons.

The urban myth persists that Martins consume thousands of mosquitoes daily, thus partially explaining the desire of humans to provide nesting houses near our residences. In practice, the birds prefer larger insect species who provide more nutrition per capture. Additionally, Martins feed during the day, while mosquitoes are primarily nocturnal. Foraging at higher altitudes also does not allow for an abundance of skeeters who prefer staying close to the ground.

Both males and females visit several cavities before choosing a site. He best choose a good site as the female chooses her mate largely based on the nest site he occupies. She can have 1-2 broods annually of 3-6 eggs which she will incubate for 15-18 days followed by a 9-10 day nestling period. The young are then ready to fledge but will continue to be fed by their parents for an additional 1-2 weeks while they strengthen their flying ability. In



Feature Story: Return of the Purple Martins by Lonnie Childs

central Texas, the colony of birds will vacate their nests and gather in communal areas where they will continue to feed and allow time for the youth to further develop their flying skills. In north Austin, there are two shopping center locations where the Martins congregate in the thousands that creates a cacophonous spectacle worth seeing. By August, they will be ready to set off on their grueling journey to South America for the winter sojourn.

Nothing heralds the eminent arrival of spring like the *“chirp, chortle, rattle, and croak”* of a chattering colony. My spirits are always heightened by their boisterous communication and soaring aerial acrobatics. For a sample, enjoy their song by Right Clicking [Here](#) & “Open Hyperlink.” Better yet, come out to FNC to hear them live & enjoy their acrobatic show. They will not disappoint.

Source: allaboutbirds.org



Photos by Dot Maginot 2023

Bird Lover Tip of the Month

The Purple Martins are Coming!! Time to clean out those houses or install a new one.

- ◆ Clean out your houses and gourds.
- ◆ Remove any nesting House Sparrows or Starlings.
- ◆ Remove the enclosure doors and raise the poles.
- ◆ Add an additional house or set of gourds.



For more info on Purple Martins, how to attract them, management, etc

Purple Martin Conservation Association

<https://www.purplemartin.org/>

***The Purple Martin and its Management in Texas*—Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.**

https://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_bk_w7000_0254.pdf

Nestwatch by Cornell Labs

<https://nestwatch.org/>

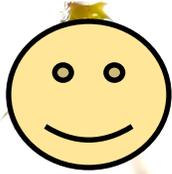
Nature's News of the Weird



***Wildlife Photographer of the Year Award
Reveals Nature in all its Bizarre Beauty***

Right Click [HERE](#) & Open Link

In Closing: Enjoy a Moment of Sycamore Zen



Right Click on Smiley for your moment of Zen.



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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Go to <http://fredericksburgNaturecenter.com/membership> for more information

Comments, questions, or future newsletter submissions can be sent to
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