

Fredericksburg Nature Notes



Newsletter of the Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center

May, 2026 Volume 7 Number 5

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

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Editor's Musings: Lonnie Childs

Dear Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center,

As I write this, our FFNC sub-committee planning our Nature Explorers Day (NED), formerly known as Third Grade Day, has just met and found it necessary to cancel the May 8th event due to the possibility of inclement weather. We were sorely disappointed as we looked forward to reviving this signature educational program focused on educating the land stewards of the future. We will be back in 2027 for a reprise without the bad weather.

Recent rains have been kind to the trails and gardens yielding welcome flower blooms punctuating the landscape. Monarchs and other butterflies and pollinators are busily fluttering flower to flower in pollen bliss. Inside the resplendent yellow Prickly Pear blooms, Kern's flower scarabs and other beetles literally roll organically in the pollen, making quite a show. The Spring migration will likely deliver some interesting species dropping in to rest at the Bird Blind. Time for a visit to FNC. The time is now!

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 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.



Looking for an unforgettable experience in nature ... If so,
Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center invites you to

TAKE A HIKE!

Saturday, May 16

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

RESERVE YOUR
SPOT ON THE HIKE
BY EMAILING
PHIL STAPLETON AT
philstapleton10@gmail.com

APPROVED FOR
1.5 HOURS OF TMN
AT CREDIT!



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 one-mile hike traverses seven microhabitats and includes visits to a bird blind, butterfly habitat, and a pollinator garden. Hikers should meet at the entrance near the trailhead adjacent to the parking lot across from the park office. Wear comfortable clothing and hiking shoes, bring water, a hiking stick (if needed) and a hat. Binoculars and cameras are also recommended. **TMN AT # 26-134**

Nature Explorers Day (NED) Gets Rained Out



Photos from past events

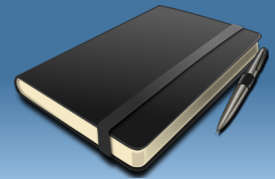


Our newly revived Nature Explorers Day (NED) scheduled for May 8th was cancelled due to the possibility of inclement weather. We were sorely disappointed as we looked forward to reviving this signature educational program focused on educating the land stewards of the future.

The FISD Third Grade class of 200+ kids were scheduled to spend a day at FNC visiting learning stations (Birds, Bats, Turtles, Butterflies, Geology, 3Rs, Prairies, & Watersheds), taking a hike, and finishing up with the ever popular raptor show by Last Chance Forever. Previous events over 15 years educated over 3,000 local children. If there was any question as to whether the message resonated with the kids, their rapt attention told the tale. Many thanks to the over forty volunteers who helped in the planning of or were participating in the event. **We will be back in 2027!**



Meet Your Neighbor! The Common Raccoon



Extremely cute, incredibly intelligent and curious, with fuzzy gray-brown fur and bushy tail ringed with black, weighing about 20 pounds and sporting a black mask, they are found all over Texas and the rest of the US. Meet the Common Raccoon, *Procyon lotor*, aka Trash Panda!

Raccoons typically prefer wooded areas close to sources of water but can be found in a large variety of environments, including inner cities. These furry bandits are extremely adaptable, making them very successful. The attempt to eradicate natural predators, coyotes, and bobcats in our state means that there is no longer as much of a natural check in place to keep balance in the raccoon population. As populations increase, so does their range, bringing them into more contact with human populations.

Typically nocturnal, they can be found during the day. You may see mothers with babies (called cubs) and juvenile raccoons out exploring when food is scarce, and there is a need to search for food during daytime hours.

Mating season is in April and May producing anywhere from 2 to 7 cubs once a year. Young raccoons stay with their mother for up to 9 months learning how to survive in the wild.

Raccoons have a broad diet featuring frogs, reptiles, small rodents, fish, crawfish, bird eggs, fruits, seeds, nuts, garden vegetables, insects, carrion, pet food, and human garbage. Their black mask is like eye black used by football players and helps to absorb bright light, making it easier for them to see at night. Five very nimble, super sensitive fingers on the front paws allow them to distinguish between different objects without seeing them, and five toes on the back feet make them excellent climbers, enabling them to find a variety of food sources. They can dismantle a bird feeder in no time flat by literally unscrewing the screws to get to the seed! Yes, I had first hand privilege of being amazed at this “fun fact”!

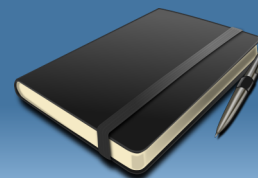
As appealing as they look, it is illegal to keep raccoons as pets in the state of Texas. They carry parasites and diseases that are transmissible to humans and animals as well as ticks and fleas. Raccoons can cause considerable damage to gardens, property, and to your home, as well as putting outside pets at risk of an attack. If you have a raccoon take up residence around your home, it is advisable that he or she be humanely relocated by a professional.

Sources: Texas Parks and Wildlife, Wikipedia, AI



Nature Journaling—By Rebecca Stapleton, TMN

Meet Your Neighbor! The Common Raccoon



Journal Art by Rebecca Stapleton

Birds are on the Move!!



While you were sleeping last night, thousands of birds were navigating northward across the night skies in quest of their summer home. Why in the world are they committing themselves to instinctually travel thousands of miles oftentimes in the dark of night?

Why do birds migrate? Birds migrate to move from areas of declining resources to areas of increasing resources—the primary resources being food and nesting conditions. Seasonal climates operate as fundamental drivers, since they influence where and when resources decrease or increase. One credible theory posits that avian migration evolved by a gradual extension of smaller annual movements as birds searched for improved food or breeding opportunities.

Of the 350 (not quite 50%) North American continental species that migrate, they fall into three categories—short distance migrants (miles), medium distance migrants (hundreds of miles), and long distance migrants who travel thousands of miles each way. Short distance migrants are triggered by the simple availability of food while long distance migrants evolved by a complexity of factors and genetics. As the last period of glaciation ended 75,000-11,000 years ago, this would have generated cyclical climatic changes and opened summer breeding grounds increasingly further north. While climatic changes probably influenced migratory evolution, today's climate changes are occurring faster than contemporary birds can adapt.

What triggers migration? The mechanisms inducing migratory behavior are not completely understood. Migration can be triggered by a combination of changes in day length, lower temperatures, changes in food supplies, and genetic predisposition.

How do they navigate? This question also requires further scientific investigation. Birds derive their amazing navigational skills by employing a combination of different senses. They cypher directional information from the sun, the stars, the earth's magnetic field, and from the position of the setting sun and from visual landmarks. Other species, such as waterfowl and cranes, follow preferred pathways on their annual migrations.

When are peak migration periods?

Spring Migration Dates

Full Spring Migration Period: March 1 – June 15

Critical Spring Peak Migration Period: April 19 – May 7

Fall Migration Dates

Full Fall Migration Period: August 15 – November 30

Critical Fall Peak Migration Period: September 5 – October 29



Migration Hazards! For those long-distance migrants, the naturally occurring hazards are many and daunting—the physical stress of the trip, inadequate food supplies in route, inclement weather, and increased exposure to predators. Climate change increases the challenges of finding food sources and encountering bad weather.

In modern times, communication towers and tall buildings present fatal risks to long-distance migrants. The

Birds are on the Move!!



lights of tall buildings attract some species and millions of birds die each year in collisions with the structures. For more about this problem and to find solutions, visit the [Bird Collision Prevention Alliance](#).



**The most immediate and easy action that
you can take is:
Lights out in Gillespie County!**



Tracking Bird Migration.

Using conventional weather radar, **Cornell Lab of Ornithology** developed the **Birdcast** suite of tools to track bird migration numbers and direction.

Want to know how many birds are currently in flight over Gillespie County

<https://dashboard.birdcast.org/region/US-TX-171>

On the night of May 6 , 212,800 birds had flown over Gillespie County.

Explore how many birds are currently migrating over the US.

BirdCast, live migration map; date and time (most easily accessible from image file name/s). Cornell Lab of Ornithology. <https://birdcast.org/migration-tools/live-migration-maps>. Date/s of access or download.

Source: *The Basics of Bird Migration: How, Why, and Where*; 8/1/2021; Cornell Lab—All About Birds allaboutbirds.org



Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Coccyzus americanus

Some favorite
migrants have arrived
for the summer!



Summer Tanager
Piranga rubra



Painted Bunting
Passerina ciris

Photos by Bill Lindemann

Pollinators at Work



Sutured Longhorn Beetle (*Batyle suturalis*)



Reakirt's Blue (*Echinargus isola*)



American Lady (*Vanessa virginiensis*)
on Zizotes Milkweed (*A. oenotheroides*)



Gray Hairstreak (*Strymon melinus*) on
Stiff Greenthread (*Thelesperma filifolium*)

Photos by Phil Stapleton

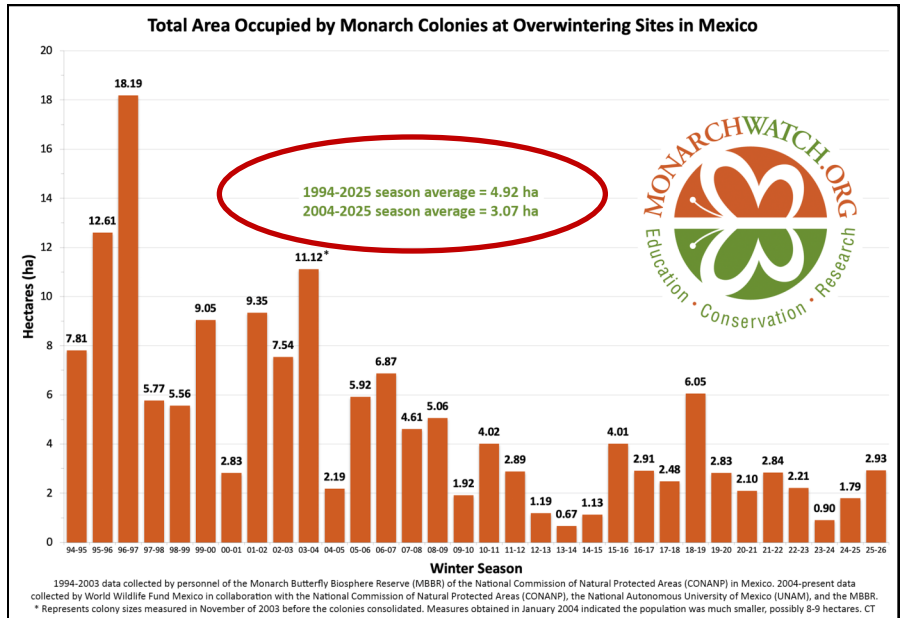
Monarch Butterfly Population Increases by 64%

Read the headline, and it offers positive news about our threatened population of Monarch Butterflies. The amount of forested timber lost to illegal logging in their wintering area in Mexico also slowed in 2025. The flipside is that the population increase reflects a recovery from historically low numbers. The chart below produced by [Monarch Watch](#) measures the population by the hectares (1 hectare = 2.47 ac) of land occupied by the wintering population in central Mexico. Overall, the trend is negative over the past 20 years, but let's celebrate this year's improvement.

The Monarchs typically arrive in central Texas in mid March to April as they fly up the central flyway to the Midwest and Eastern US. Recent Spring rains helped mitigate drought conditions in south and central Texas, but the March 17th freeze was not helpful here for milkweeds or the Monarchs. Recall that Monarchs only lay their eggs on milkweeds, and the 1st generation on the migration north will do so in Texas. In the eastern and northeastern sections of Gillespie County, Antelope Horns (*Asclepias Asperula*) have appeared abundantly in the past month. On the return trip in the fall, they will be searching for nectar plants. Texas is vitally important to their migration success. Do your part by planting/preserving milkweeds or planting a [pollinator garden](#).

Come check out FFNC's Pollinator Garden at LBJ Park.

To educate yourself on the awesome saga of the Monarchs, go to [Monarch Watch](#).



Above left: **Monarch on Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)**
 Above right: **Antelope Horns (*Asclepias Asperula*)**
 Left: **Monarch larva**
 Photos by Lonnie Childs

Blumen @ the Gartens & Along the Trails



Texas Green-eyes
(Berlandiera betonicifolia)



Texas Skeleton Plant
(Lygodesmia texana)



Slender Greenthread
(Thelesperma simplicifolium)



Tropical or Scarlet Sage
(Salvia coccinea)

Rainfall + Sunshine have stimulated a Spring bloom along the trails and in the gardens much improved over the past several years. Come out and enjoy the blossoms!

Photos by Phil Stapleton

In Closing...



Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*)

Photo by Phil Stapleton

Nature's News of the Weird

Marvel at the new Monarch tracking technology

Right Click [HERE](#) & Open Link

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 2026!

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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