



# Fredericksburg Nature Notes

Newsletter of the Friends of the  
Fredericksburg Nature Center

June, 2026 Volume 7 Number 6

## In this Issue:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| • <b>FFNC Events</b> - page 2                         | - <i>Hiking Group Visits FNC</i> - page 12    |
| • <b>In Search of the Lost Fireflies</b> - page 3 - 5 | - <i>Bird Blind Gets New Chairs</i> - page 13 |
| • <b>Nature Journaling</b> - page 6 - 7               | • <b>Conservation Corner</b> - page 14 - 16   |
| • <b>Volunteer Spotlight</b> - pages 8 - 9            | • <b>Buzzin the Garden</b> - pages 17 - 8     |
| • <b>FFNC Stories</b> - pages 10 - 13                 | • <b>Volunteer Corner</b> - page 19           |
| - <i>A Simple Bench</i> - pages 10 - 11               | • <b>A Vision Worth Growing</b> - page 20     |

## Editor's Musing by Lonnie Childs

If you are reading this, you may not have gone far, but you have probably been dazzled by the new look of the newsletter. Here at FFNC headquarters, we recruited (maybe she just volunteered) some new publishing talent in the form of Barbara Shirley, Hill Country Master Naturalist Class of 2026. Barbara will double our large staff of one and has already exhibited her skills by creating a new eye-catching layout and providing new content and insights. We heartily welcome Barbara!

For those of us old enough to remember the memorable nights of abundant lightning bugs (i.e. fireflies), or even if you want to create some brand new memories, our Live Oak Creek corridor provides excellent habitat in support of a healthy firefly population. Attend our firefly program, and we guarantee firefly sightings and a chance to get educated and hopefully inspired about how to create your own firefly habitat. It promises to be a flashy evening at the park. Read the newsletter for all the details.

The spring rains have enlivened the trail and gardens in ways not seen for several years. The Pollinator Garden in particular is blossoming and hosting an abundance of butterflies, caterpillars, bees, and dragonflies. Take a hike first and then venture over to the garden for a moment of rest and repose under the shade of the arbor. You will delight at Mother Nature's show, and your Apple Watch will congratulate you for healthy living.

*Happy Nature Trails, Lonnie*





# Fredricksburg Nature Center Events

## Fireflies of the Texas Hill Country

*A Nature Workshop & Twilight Viewing*

**Saturday, June 27, 2026**

**7:30 to 9:30 p.m.**

**Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park  
(Pavilion 1)**

***Presenter: Ben Pfeiffer***

***Texas Master Naturalist and Founder of  
Firefly.org, a Texas Firefly Conservation &  
Research Organization***

***Attendees should bring a blanket or camp chair  
Flashlights are not permitted unless they have a red light function  
Approved for 2 hours of Texas Master Naturalist AT Credit***



# In Search of the Lost Fireflies of Texas



Photo by firefly.org

by Lonnie Childs

In my youth growing up in Texas, the allure of lightning bugs on a warm summer's night was a fascinating spectacle that many of us shared – little Tinker Belle's captured in a jar. We could not imagine that the experience would become a fleeting memory as firefly populations diminished over the ensuing decades. When the opportunity to chase fireflies again and participate in a scientific mystery presented itself, I could not resist the call.

In 2018, Dr. James E. Lloyd, Professor Emeritus – Univ. of Florida (aka the Firefly Doc) reported on a 1999 visit to "Gillespie County, TX... on route 16 near Lady Bird Municipal Park, Fredericksburg, at the Live Oak Creek bridge" in search of *Photuris* species. At this location, he observed a unique male specimen which resembled two other species but whose flash pattern of ~2.5 seconds distinguished it from the other species. He ultimately described it as a new species designating it as *Photuris polacekae* in honor of his first Biology professor, Barbaa Polacek. This species has never been observed again in any location. And thus, a scientific mystery was born.

Fast forward to 2025 where Ben Pfeifer, modern day firefly researcher, conservationist, and founder of Firefly Conservation & Research was working on a catalogue of Texas and Southwest firefly species. As part of that effort, he had been researching the "lost" species that have been only intermittently observed such as *P. polacekae*. He visited a sight near the pedestrian bridge on Live Oak Creek in pursuit of the mystery species and noted "This habitat provides a mosaic of dry upland slopes likely used by adults as mating arenas and wetter riparian zones that may support larval foraging and development, while tree-lined sections appear favorable for advertising male."

## (In Search of the Lost Fireflies of Texas - continued from page 3)

The 2025 visit did not yield a sighting which brought him back in May, 2026, for another attempt with the assistance of FFNC members Dave Oelrich, Greta Oelrich, Gordon Downey, and Lonnie Childs – citizen scientists in action. On a Saturday evening near dusk, we grabbed insect nets and red tinted headlamps for our firefly adventure along the Live Oak Wilderness Trail.



**Photo by Lonnie Childs**

Our technique involved splitting up to search the length of the trail. As the male fireflies began to flash, we would note if it was a single or double flash and then count the approximate seconds until the next flash. The most commonly seen fireflies are in the *Photinus* genus and would flash at a 4 second interval. Another frequently observed species cruised down the trail straight at us in drone-like fashion with a flash interval of 1 second, as it covered a large territory in a frenetic attempt to attract a female. As the fireflies approached, we would wildly swing our nets to and fro in an attempt to capture the intended victim. My personal batting average was quite low, but I had a few successes.

We netted specimens and labeled the vial with the flash pattern. Ben would later have the specimens photographed for exact identification efforts. Our estimate was that we probably captured three species. By about 9pm, the fireflies began to drift higher beyond our netting capability. Recall that the *Photuris polacekae* species flashes at an interval of ~2.5 seconds. Despite our anticipation and best efforts, we did not appear to capture the elusive species in question. So, the mystery continues. Are there *P. polacekae* still out there hiding, waiting to tease the next citizen science adventurers willing to traipse about in the dark while wildly swinging a net at drone-like insects flashing their lights? Come to our June 27th program, and maybe you will catch a glimpse of one of the “lost” species of Texas.

Sources:

Lloyd, J. E. 2018. **A naturalist’s long walk among shadows: of North American Photuris – patterns, outlines, silhouettes... echoes.** Self-published, Gainesville, FL, USA.

Fallon, et al; **Extinguished or overlooked? An examination of lost firefly species of the US and Canada**

## (In Search of the Lost Fireflies of Texas - continued from page 4)

### Some Firefly Facts:

- Fireflies are beetles, with more than 2,400 species worldwide.
- Each species has a distinct flash pattern, timing, color, and habitat preference.
- Fireflies emit light primarily to attract mates or to communicate for other reasons, such as to defend territory and warn off predators.
- In most species, both sexes glow — the male typically flies while the female waits in vegetative cover watching for an attractive mate. When she spots one, she signals him with a flash of her own.
- The adult females of the *Photuris* genus are notable for preying on other fireflies. They engage in aggressive mimicry, imitating the light signals that other firefly species' females use to attract mates – but *Photuris* use it to attract, kill and eat the unsuspecting males of those other species.
- What are the causes of firefly population reductions? Habitat loss, light pollution pesticide use, and a changing climate.
- **What can you do to help the fireflies?**
  - Turn off outdoor exterior lights.
  - Leave a wild corner of your yard – native vegetation for habitat.
  - Skip pesticides.
  - Protect riparian areas – leave the vegetation.
  - Share the magic of fireflies with your children and grandchildren!



Photo by firefly.org



# Nature Journaling

## ***Meet Your Neighbor!***

by Rebecca Stapleton, TMN

### **Northern Mockingbird ( *Mimos polyglottos* )**

Meet the Northern Mockingbird, the official state bird of Texas since 1927 and a regular visitor to most backyards! They are known for their ability to mimic the songs of other birds as well as mimic mechanical sounds, amphibians and even backyard pets! During its lifetime, a male can learn as many as 200 songs. Females are attracted to males able to make the most sounds. Unmated males will sing well into the night to establish territory and attract a mate.

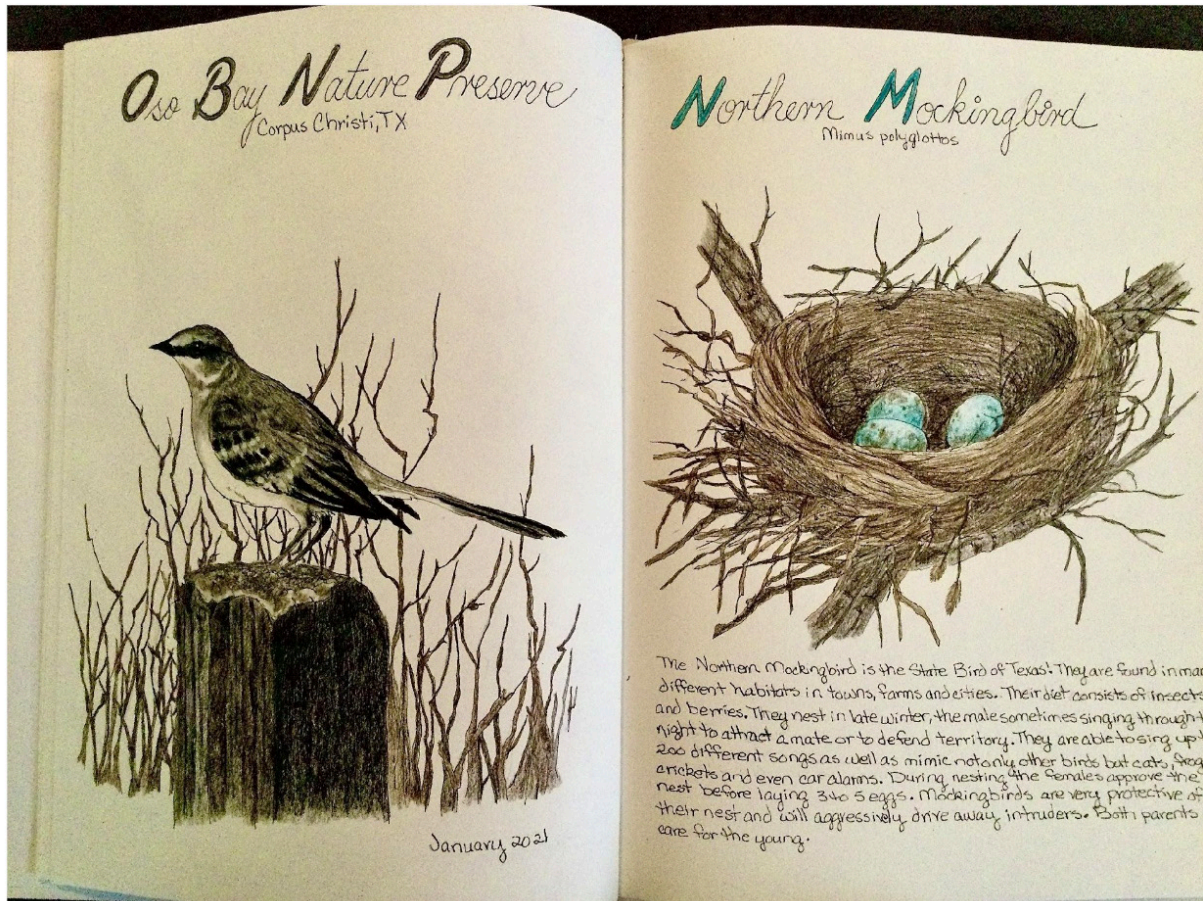
Mockingbirds are not migratory and will claim the same territory each year nesting in the same spots. They will nest late February into August. Males will build new, multiple nests but it's the female that decides which one she will lay her eggs in. They rarely reuse old nests, and because they build open cup shaped nests will not use birdhouses. Females lay anywhere from 2 to 6 pale blue or greenish white with brown splotched eggs raising 2 to 3 broods each year. They are both extremely territorial and will aggressively defend the nest protecting it from predators and birds much larger than themselves as well as from humans and pets.

They are one of the few species of birds that have the ability to recognize and remember human faces. They can assess a potential threat within 30 seconds and are able to single out the human considered to be a danger in a group of a dozen or so people. They also remember the humans that they consider to be harmless and will tolerate them within the nest site.

Mockingbirds have a variety of food preferences. They enjoy fruits, berries, insects, small crustaceans, and vertebrates. To attract them to your yard, offer mealworms and fruit on a platform feeder along with fresh water. Plant dense shrubs and trees to encourage nesting and berry producing plants such as American Beautyberry.

## (Nature Journaling by Rebecca Stapleton - continued from page 6)

Sources~ Texas Parks and Wildlife, National Audubon, All About Birds, AI



Journal Art by~ Rebecca Stapleton





# Volunteer Spotlight

## *Volunteer Spotlight – Jackie Gibler*

As a child our family moved around a lot, due to my father’s profession as a merchant marine. We lived in many coastal seaport cities before settling in Houston during my early adolescence. I met my husband, Michael, there in 1972 and we were together for 50 years before his passing in May, 2022. My late husband and I moved to the Texas Hill Country in 1980. Fredericksburg is where we raised our three children and built our home.

I attended Blinn Jr. College, Bryan Campus, Texas A&M briefly, and then continued at Austin Community College, while working full-time jobs. I was studying to become a Social Worker but was unable to continue when our first child was born in 1978.



Jackie Gibler

I had various jobs, in many different fields, but the job that was the most meaningful was working for the State ECI program (Early Childhood Intervention). My position was Team Assistant for the healthcare interdisciplinary team and community outreach coordinator. After the state cut funding for the program, I found employment as a Lighting Consultant for 26 years, collaborating with architects, interior designers, builders, and clients to design and implement lighting solutions for a wide range of projects.

After two major life-changing events, becoming a widow and retirement, I was in search of a new path forward. I have always been drawn to the natural world, and being close to nature is where I find peace and solace.

What first sparked my interest in nature?

(Volunteer Spotlight - Jackie Gibler - continued from page 8)

I grew up in a time when we were told “go outside and play”, without any instruction or planned structure, and very little supervision. So, my brother and I had competitions climbing trees to see who could reach the very top first. We had Chinaberry fights, made a rope swing, and created a fort in a vacant field where we played in an abandoned truck. We also played in dirty ditch water, looked for crawdads, chased lightning bugs, and before we knew better, we rode our bikes behind the DDT trucks that sprayed poison. So, I guess you can say I was a tree hugger/nature lover before I even understood what the terms meant.

My love for gardening started very early in life. I’ve planted many organic gardens and have had both successful and failed outcomes, but I’ve enjoyed the process along the way. I joined the Native Plant Society of Texas- Fredericksburg chapter in 2022, which sparked my interest and has led to many other educational opportunities, including being interested in the TX Master Naturalist Program.

My area of interest in becoming a TMN is land stewardship and wildlife management principles. I manage 17 acres, which I recently changed from agriculture use to wildlife management use. My goal is to learn all I can to become a better land steward. Also, I’m interested in learning more about native plant landscape design. In pursuit of those personal objectives, I was accepted into the Texas Master Naturalist fall class of 2025 and fulfilled the TMN-required volunteer hours at the Fredericksburg Nature Center by the end of the 12-week training process.

My initial connection to Lady Bird Park began in the 1980’s when I would take my kids to the park regularly. We would walk along the lake there and watch the ducks and birds. I was excited when the nature trail was first developed at the park in 2000. I feel the park is woven into the tapestry of my life. I first became involved with the FFNC, after a guided trail walk in 2024, led by Lonnie Childs. During the guided hike, I learned of the FFNC’s mission & the volunteer opportunities offered there, and how volunteering at the FFNC ties into the TMN program.

I volunteer on “Tuesday workdays” as often as possible. I’ve done trail work, weeding, raking, trimming, planting trees, feeding the birds and cleaning the bird station, and worked in the FNC pollinator garden. I also volunteered at the Monarch workshop, and other FNC events. I’ve been invited to lunch meetings with the FFNC board members, which adds a very nice social aspect to the volunteer work.

What do you enjoy most about your volunteer work in FFNC? The simple answer is I enjoy learning, and I continue to learn so much from the knowledgeable dedicated volunteers at the FFNC. I also enjoy the social aspect of meeting other volunteers and staying active. Volunteering at the nature center is meaningful to me, because I enjoy being part of something that future generations can enjoy, appreciate, and hopefully continue to foster. I look forward to engaging with individuals who share similar interests and aspirations, and to contributing meaningfully within a network of dedicated volunteers.





# FFNC Stories

## ***A Simple Bench with a Story to Tell***

In the aftermath of the July flood of 2025 on the Guadalupe River, Paul Person, FFNC Board member, was able to secure a Bald Cypress tree trunk which had been felled by the flood and landed near Comfort. Several members of FFNC donated the cost to mill it into lumber suitable for making benches or other items to memorialize the event. Former Board member and volunteer, Tom Hynes, stepped forward to offer his furniture making skills to construct benches for auction to attendees at our workshops, which have proven to be sought after pieces.



Tom Hynes

This spring, Tom was contacted by a representative of the newly opened Heart of the Hills Heritage Center in Kerrville (a museum whose mission is to Connect our community with the unique stories of the Texas Hill Country...) about making a bench to display for a year in the center to memorialize the disastrous flood event. FFNC and Tom gladly accepted the wood-working magic and produced this beautiful bench with a story to tell that will live on through this bench. Thanks, Tom!



**(A Simple Bench with a Story to Tell continued from page 10)**

**A Simple Bench with a Story to Tell**

Tom Hynes

Donated by Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

Sit with me to remember, contemplate, meditate or just rest. The bells in my legs represent the bells which tolled for those who perished that fateful date. The added strength of my legs represents the unwavering strength of the community and volunteers who supported and endured the aftermath. The seat and all that I am represents the sacrifice of resources to the Guadalupe River.



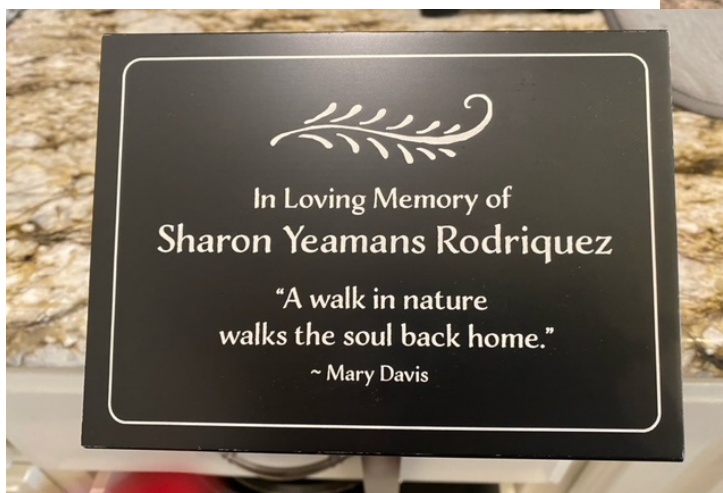
**Photos by  
Nancy Huffman**

## **Hiking Group Visits FNC**

The WWW local ladies walking group paid a visit to FNC on May 14th hosted by FFNC Publicity Coordinator, Patti Guin. The group toured the garden, hiked the trails, and took advantage of the opportunity to visit the memorial bench and Desert Willow tree planted in honor of Sharon Rodriguez near the Cactus and Hummingbird Gardens. Sharon was a long-time FFNC volunteer and Board member who faithfully tended to these gardens and passed away in 2021. She was also a member of this hiking group who planted the Desert Willow in her remembrance. Thanks to Patti for hosting and the group for visiting!



**Photos by Lonnie Childs**



***"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks." John Muir***

## ***Bird Blind Gets New Chairs!***

For quite some time, we have been receiving suggestions and complaints that we needed to replace the rickety stools in the Bird Blind. One person even advised that their “tush bird” was singing louder than the birds in the blind. After months of soliciting to no avail, Trudy Eberhardt, FFNC Board member, scored these stylish and comfortable stools at a garage sale for \$20 and even gave them a fresh coat of paint. Thanks Trudy!

Brad McQueen of Oro Valley, Arizona, was recently enjoying the new comfort while bird watching at the blind, along with canine companion, Augie, who found the cool concrete floor more to his suiting. Make a visit to the Bird Blind and try them out!



**Photo by Lonnie Childs**





## Conservation Corner

### *National Pollinator Week (June 22–28, 2026) Celebrating the Tiny Creatures That Keep Nature Blooming*

Each June, communities across the country celebrate **\*\*National Pollinator Week\*\***, a time dedicated to recognizing the important role pollinators play in healthy ecosystems, agriculture, and our everyday lives. In 2026, Pollinator Week will take place June 22–28.

Pollinators are the animals that help plants reproduce by carrying pollen from flower to flower. While honeybees are perhaps the most familiar pollinators, many other creatures also perform this vital work, including native bees, butterflies, moths, hummingbirds, beetles, flies, and even bats.

Here in the Texas Hill Country, pollinators are an important part of the natural beauty we enjoy each year. From spring wildflowers to late summer blooms, native plants and pollinators work together to support wildlife and maintain healthy habitats.

Visitors to the Fredericksburg Nature Center may notice:

- \* butterflies drifting through native gardens,
- \* hummingbirds visiting,
- \* native bees gathering pollen,
- \* and moths and other nighttime pollinators quietly working after sunset.

Many of our familiar Hill Country plants provide valuable food and habitat for pollinators, including:

- \* Gregg's mistflower,
- \* Texas lantana,
- \* Turk's cap,
- \* mealy blue sage,
- \* flame acanthus,
- \* and native milkweeds.



Sonoran Bumble Bee  
(*Bombus sonorus*)

Pollinators are more than just beautiful to observe. Scientists estimate that roughly one out of every three bites of food we eat depends on pollination. Pollinators also help support the native plants that provide shelter and food for birds and other wildlife.

*(National Pollinator Week - Continued from page 14)*

Unfortunately, pollinator populations face growing challenges from habitat loss, pesticide use, invasive species, and changing climate conditions. National Pollinator Week serves as a reminder that even small actions can make a difference.

Simple ways to help pollinators include:

- \* planting native flowers,
- \* reducing pesticide use,
- \* providing shallow water sources,
- \* leaving some natural habitat areas undisturbed,
- \* and supporting native plant gardens.

Even a small patio container garden or backyard flower bed can provide important resources for pollinators.

Summer is an excellent time to slow down and observe the busy activity happening among the blooms around us. Whether it's a monarch butterfly resting on milkweed, a hummingbird darting between flowers, or a tiny native bee gathering pollen, pollinators remind us that healthy ecosystems often depend on the smallest creatures.

This National Pollinator Week, take a moment to appreciate the hardworking pollinators that help keep the Texas Hill Country blooming.



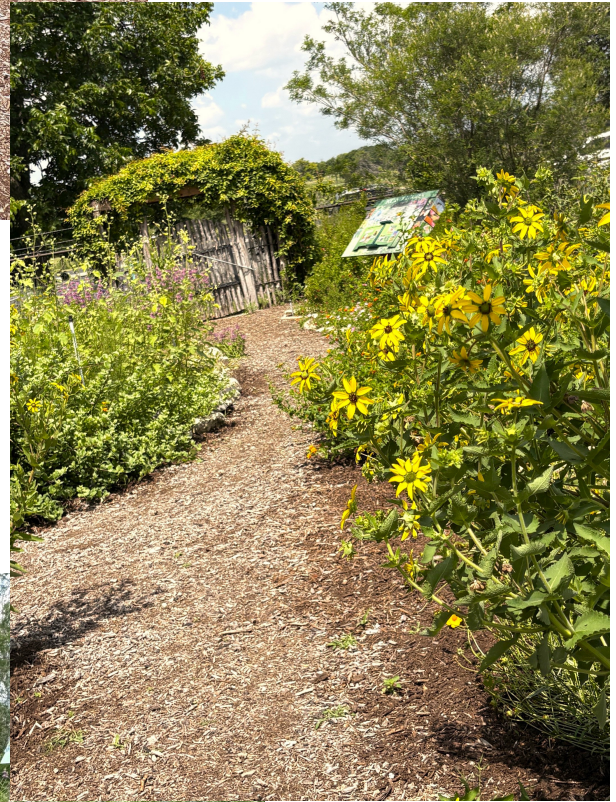
Vine Sphinx Moth (*Eumorpha vitis*)

*"The earth has music for those who listen." — William Shakespeare*



## Pollinator Garden

*Take a walk in the garden.*





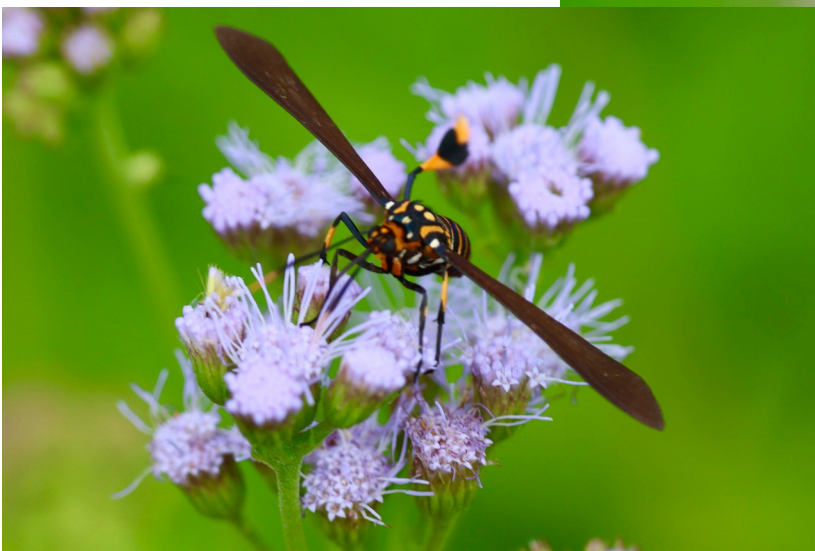
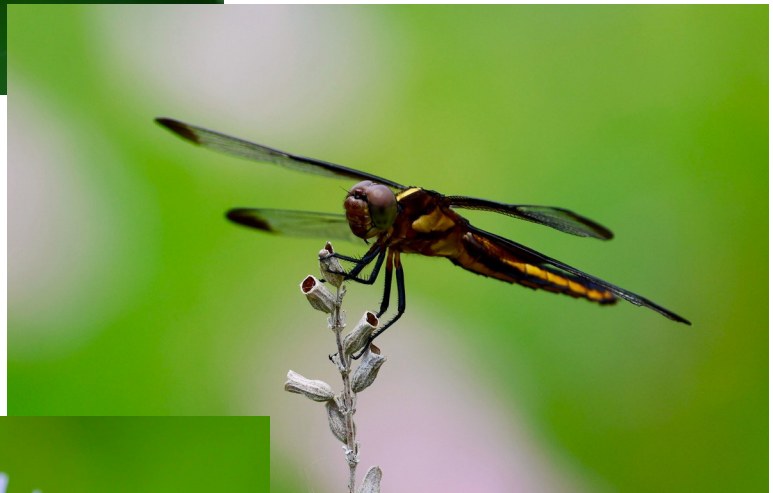
# Buzzin the Garden

All photos credited to  
Phil Stapleton



**Bee Fly**  
(*Chrysanthrax edititius*)  
Practicing tight rope walking.

**Widow Skimmer**  
(*Libellula luctuosa*)  
The mascot species of FNC



**Texas Wasp Moth**  
(*Horama panthalon*)  
It's a bee! It's a wasp! No, it's a moth!?  
They use **Batesian mimicry**,  
mimicking the dangerous  
appearance of a paper wasp to  
protect themselves from  
predators such as birds.

## Buzzin the Garden - continued from page 14

### *Butterflies in the Garden*



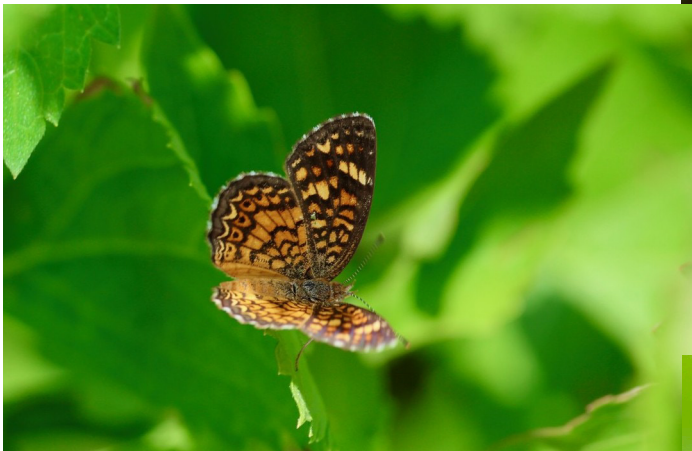
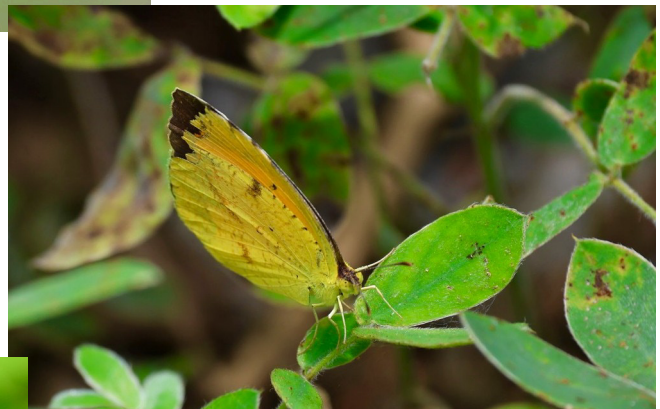
#### **Queen**

(*Danaus gilippus*) on a Red Coral Yucca (*Hesperaloe parviflora*) The flesh colored protuberance is her ovipositor used for depositing eggs on milkweeds. On the end, you can see a speck of the white sticky secretion that is used to cement the eggs to the plant.

#### **Sleepy Orange**

(*Eurema nicippe*)

Its' name derives from the small, closed-eye marking on the forewing, not from its' behavior. When disturbed, it can fly rapidly and evasively.



#### **Gulf Fritillary larva**

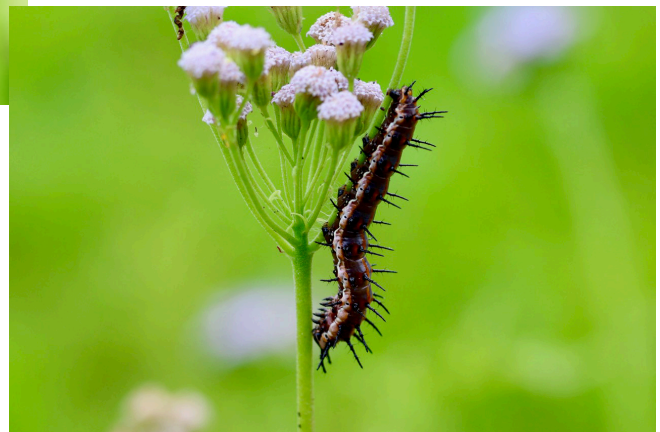
(*Agraulis vanillae*) on Gregg's Bluemist. Its' primary host plant is Passionflower vine (*Passiflora incarnata* or *lutea*).

**All photos credited to  
Phil Stapleton**

#### **Vesta Crescent**

(*Phyciodes graphica*)

Its' host plant where it lays its eggs is Tube tongue, *Siphonoglossa pilosella*





## Our Mission Statement

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

## Volunteer Corner

### Fun Tuesdays - Consider Volunteering with the Fredericksburg Nature Center

**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!



### 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

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.



For more information, contact Lonnie Childs at [lonniechilds@utexas.edu](mailto:lonniechilds@utexas.edu)

<http://fredericksburgnaturecenter.com>

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



# A Vision Worth Growing

## Consider Supporting Fredericksburg Nature Center in 2026

**Please consider becoming a Member of FFNC. Our operations are funded by membership fees & donations.**

**[Click here to become a member.](#)**

**Donate to the A Vision Worth Growing Campaign (Bill Lindemann Capital Fund) which will fund our future Interpretive Center project.**

**[Donate to the A Vision Worth Growing Campaign.](#)**

### Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center Board of Directors

- Lonnie Childs - President
- Billy Guin - Vice President
- Carl Luckenbach - Treasurer
- Gracie Waggener - Secretary
- Jane Crone
- Trudy Eberhardt
- Laura Grant
- Kathy Lewis
- Mary Ellen Terrell
- Dave Oelrich

**Thanks to our supporters and the City of Fredericksburg  
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