



Fredericksburg Nature Notes

Newsletter of the Friends of the
Fredericksburg Nature Center

July 2026 Volume 7 Number 7

In This Issue

Fireflies Light Up the Night at FNC - [pg. 2 - 3](#)

Protecting the Pedernales Workshop - [pg. 4](#)

FNC Named a Pollinator Champion - [pg. 5 - 6](#)

Texas River Cooter - [pg. 7 - 8](#)

National Moth Week - [pg. 9](#)

Pictures From the Garden - [pg. 10 - 12](#)

Chiltepin - The Mother of Peppers - [p 13 - 15](#)

Volunteer Corner - [p. 16](#)

A Vision Worth Growing - [pg. 17](#)

Editor's Musing by Lonnie Childs

Our recent Fireflies in the Park event shown a welcome light on forgotten memories of marveling at the “lightning bugs” of yesteryear. Discovery and wonder, freely bestowed benefits of Mother Nature, transported us all back to our youth for a moment. If you want a touch of awe, venture down to our pedestrian bridge on Live Oak Creek at dusk, and bring your children along for the memory building. We are thankful that we have preserved a healthy riparian habitat along Live Oak Creek that supports fireflies but sobered by the fact that examples like this are diminishing. Learn how you can promote firefly habitat in your backyard, and help bring back the fireflies with a dose of wonder to boot.

Congratulations to our Pollinator Garden team led by Gracie Waggener for their recognition as a Pollinator Champion by the Pollinator Garden Assistance and Recognition Program (PGARP). Currently, the garden is in full bloom and buzzing and fluttering with all manner of pollinators. It's another of the wonders of FNC worth your visit. Then, check out the PGARP program as a resource to learn how to create your own backyard pollinator paradise. Consider the possibilities for your home landscape – fireflies and butterflies.

*Happy Nature Trails,
Lonnie*

[Fredericksburg Nature Center](#)

[FNC Facebook](#)



Fredericksburg Nature Center Events



Ben Pfeiffer

Fireflies Light Up the Night at FNC

On the evening of June 27, more than 80 people gathered at Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park for “Fireflies Light Up the Night,” an educational program sponsored by the Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center. Ben Pfeiffer gave an engaging presentation about the biology, behavior, and conservation of Texas’ native fireflies, explaining the importance of protecting their habitats from light pollution and environmental changes. Following the presentation, participants enjoyed a guided evening walk along Live Oak Creek, where they were rewarded with the magical sight of fireflies flashing among the trees and vegetation, bringing the night’s lessons to life. The program combined education with firsthand observation, leaving attendees with a greater appreciation for these remarkable insects and the importance of conserving the natural spaces they depend on.

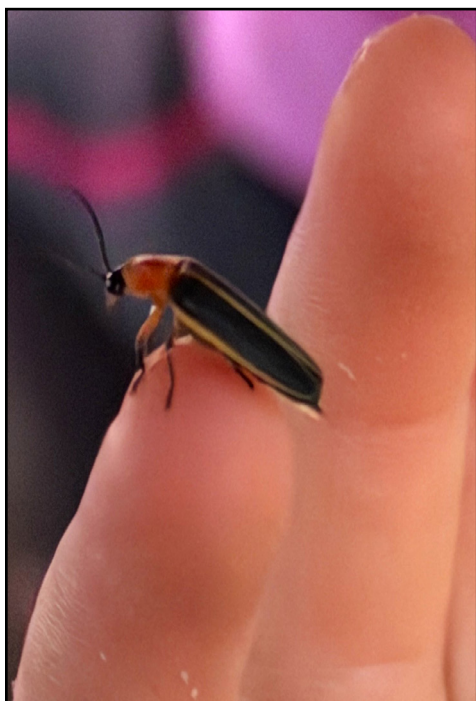


For further information visit their website -
[Firefly Conservation & Research](#)

Photos by Patti Guin

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 2



An obliging firefly (Photo: Patty Guin)

Audience attending the presentation (Photo: Patty Guin)



Examining a firefly (Photo: Lonnie Childs)



Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center presents

Protecting the Pedernales

Lessons in Conservation and Stewardship

Saturday, September 19, 2026 – 10:00 A.M.

AgriLife Extension Office

38 Business Court, Fredericksburg

Guest Speaker: Lauro Martinez

Landowner Outreach & Stewardship Manager

Hill Country Alliance

Approved for 1 Hour of Texas Master Naturalist AT Credit



**Photo by Alexander Neal, a Texas Rivers Protection
Association Member**

RSVP to gwaggener@flow-apps.com



Happenings in the Garden

Fredericksburg Nature Center Named a Pollinator Champion

The Fredericksburg Nature Center's Pollinator Garden was officially recognized as a Pollinator Champion by the Pollinator Garden Assistance and Recognition Program (PGARP) in June. The designation recognizes gardens that provide essential habitat for pollinators through the use of native plants, season-long blooms, water sources, and environmentally responsible gardening practices. The honor reflects the dedication of the volunteers who have worked to create and maintain a vibrant habitat that supports bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, and many other important pollinators.



Congratulations to **Nancy Person, Deb Youngblood, Gracie Waggener, Trudy Eberhardt, and Lori Lester** for their outstanding stewardship of the Nature Center's Pollinator Garden. Their efforts are helping conserve the Texas Hill Country's native pollinators while providing visitors with a beautiful demonstration of how even a relatively small garden can make a lasting impact on local wildlife.

Continued on page 6



What Is PGARP?

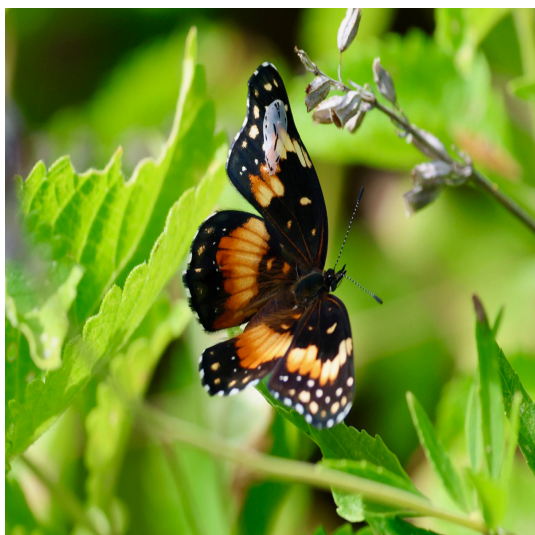
The Fredericksburg Nature Center earned its Pollinator Champion designation through the Pollinator Garden Assistance and Recognition Program (PGARP), a partnership between the Texas Master Naturalist Hill Country Chapter and local chapters of the Native Plant Society of Texas. The program helps homeowners, schools, churches, businesses, and community organizations create gardens that support Texas' native pollinators.

Volunteer experts provide guidance on selecting native plants, creating season-long blooms, supplying water and nesting habitat, and using environmentally responsible gardening practices. Gardens that meet these standards may be recognized as Pollinator Champions, demonstrating their commitment to conserving bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, bats,

hummingbirds, and other essential pollinators.

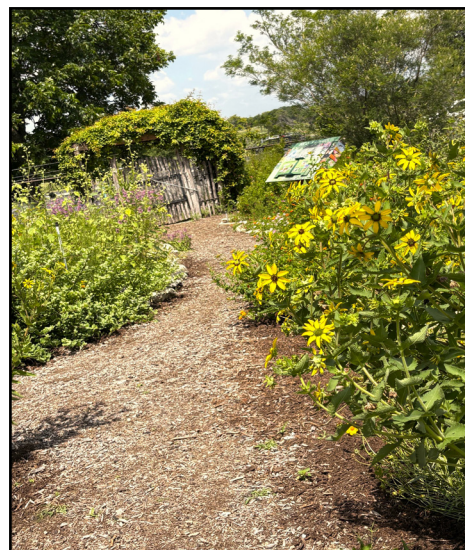
By encouraging pollinator-friendly landscapes throughout the Hill Country, PGARP shows that gardens of any size can contribute to healthier ecosystems and help ensure these important species continue to thrive.

For more information about the [Pollinator Garden Assistance and Recognition](#).



Bordered Patch
(*Chlosyne lacinia*)

Photo: Phil Stapelton



Garden Photos by
Lonnie Childs



Nature Journaling

Meet Your Neighbors

by Rebecca Stapleton, TMN

Texas River Cooter

(*Pseudemys texana*)

Meet the Texas River Cooter! It is a colorful turtle with bright yellow-green and black markings, sometimes confused with the Map Turtle and the Red-eared Slider. How many kids have brought one home from the creek to keep as a pet, and did any of us ever wash our hands afterwards? Oh my!

A relatively large turtle, the River Cooter is native to Central and South Central Texas. It is an aquatic, freshwater species with a carapace (shell) length up to 13 inches. Females are larger than the males and can weigh up to 11 pounds. Their lifespan in the wild can reach about 44 years.

Texas River Cooters prefer flowing water in creeks and rivers and can often be seen basking in the sun on rocks, fallen trees and branches. They are herbivores feeding on aquatic vegetation but will also eat insects and small fish.

Breeding is once a year, with mating beginning in March - April. Nesting season is from May - June, when females move onto land to dig their nests in the earth, laying a single clutch of 4 to 19 eggs in a 2 to 3 hour timeframe. After laying is completed, she will cover her nest and return to the water. She does not remain with the nest to protect it.

Egg incubation ranges from 80 - 150 days. Outside air temperature determines the sex of the hatchlings. Males are produced in colder nest temperatures, and females are produced in warmer nest temperatures. Hatchlings emerge in August and September, fully independent and equipped to survive.

They are listed as a species of "Least Concern," but loss of habitat, degradation, and invasive species are having some impact, even though they are considered to be a stable population.

Sources: Wikipedia, Animal Diversity Web, iNaturalist

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 5

Texas River Cooter (*Pseudemys texana*)
Artwork by Rebecca Stapleton





Nature News

National Moth Week: Discover the Hidden Beauty of the Texas Hill Country at Night

by Barbara Shirley

July 18–26, 2026

Most of us enjoy butterflies during the day, but after sunset their fascinating relatives take center stage. [National Moth Week](#) (July 18–26) is a worldwide citizen science event celebrating these often-overlooked insects. Moths are important nighttime pollinators and provide food for birds, bats, frogs, lizards, spiders, and other wildlife. July is one of the best times to observe them in the Texas Hill Country, and on a warm evening it's possible to see 20–50 different species attracted to a porch light or a white sheet illuminated with a flashlight or [UV light](#).



You don't have to travel far to participate. Your own backyard may attract a surprising variety of moths, and Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park also offers excellent habitat for many Hill Country species. I've watched White-lined Sphinx moths hovering around the skullcaps in my front flower bed and twice found a Polyphemus Moth resting on my shaded kitchen window until the morning sun warmed it enough for it to fly away. During National Moth Week, take a few minutes to step outside after dark—you may discover some of the Texas Hill Country's most beautiful wildlife right outside your door.



**White-lined Sphinx
(Hyles lineata)**

Size: Wingspan 2½–3½ inches

Often mistaken for a hummingbird, this fast-flying moth hovers in front of flowers at dusk while feeding on nectar. It is one of the easiest large moths to spot during the summer.

Photo: Dot Maginot



Pictures from the Garden

Blooming in the Garden



Sacred Datura (*Datura wightii*)

Large, fragrant white flowers open in the evening, attracting hawk moths and other night pollinators. Native to Texas and the Southwest, Sacred Datura is an important wildlife plant. Every part of the plant is highly toxic if ingested.

Evening Primrose (*Oenothera speciosa*)

This Texas native produces soft pink, cup-shaped flowers that often open in the evening and remain beautiful into the next day. A favorite of bees and butterflies, it adds color to prairies, roadsides, and native wildflower gardens each spring.



Photos by Lonnie Childs

Continued on page 11

Continued from page 10

Lindheimer's Morning Glory
(*Ipomoea lindheimeri*)

The plant is named in honor of Ferdinand Jacob Lindheimer (1801–1879), often called the Father of Texas Botany. Lindheimer collected and documented hundreds of Texas plant species, helping to lay the foundation for the study of the state's remarkable flora.

It's worth noting that its seeds are poisonous if eaten by humans and should be kept away from children and pets.



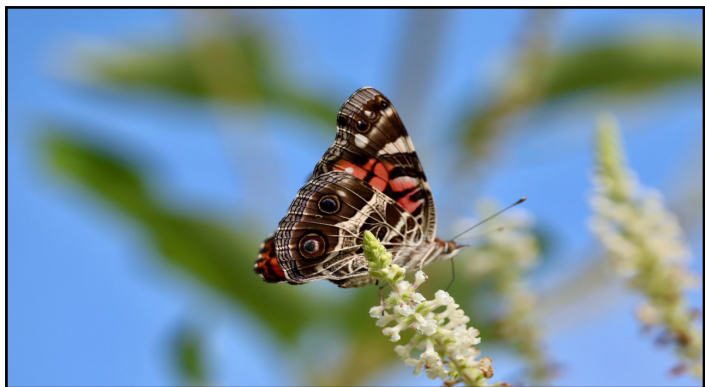
Wild Carrot (*Daucus pusillus*)

It's nickname, Rattlesnake weed has an interesting history. It earned the nickname "rattlesnake weed" from an old belief that it could treat rattlesnake bites. Native Americans and early Spanish settlers used the plant as a traditional remedy, although modern medicine has shown that snakebites require immediate emergency treatment. Fortunately, today the plant is appreciated more for its delicate lace-like flowers and its value to pollinators than for its legendary medicinal reputation.

Photos by Lonnie Childs.

Continued from page 11

Fluttering and Flying in the Garden



American painted lady or American lady
(*Vanessa virginiensis*)

One of North America's most attractive butterflies. It is similar to the Painted Lady but has several distinctive features. Eyespots: The easiest way to identify an American Lady is the two large blue eyespots on the underside of each hindwing. These eyespots are often outlined in black and orange and may help startle predators. Forewing mark: On the upper side of each forewing is a small white spot surrounded by orange, a useful field mark that helps separate it from the Painted Lady. This American Lady is sitting on a Kidenywood (*Eysenhardtia texana*).

(Photo: Phil Stapleton)

The Black-crested Titmouse (*Baeolophus atricristatus*)

Is a lively songbird found in the woodlands and brush country of central and south Texas. Unlike its Tufted Titmouse cousin, it sports a distinctive black crest and is a frequent visitor to backyard feeders, where it enjoys seeds, insects, and suet.



(Photo: Phil Stapleton)



Plants With a History



Chiltepin - The Mother of Peppers

By Lonnie Childs

When Columbus first arrived in the Caribbean Islands, perhaps his most significant botanical “discovery” was a small plant growing in the wild but also cultivated by the local native peoples which they fervently used to spice their cuisine. He mistook it for the highly prized plant that yielded black pepper and so called it the pepper plant. Actually, it was the Chiltepin plant that had been domesticated in Mexico for thousands of years. Chiltepin was transported back to Europe and then around the world in the next 100 years, where it was readily incorporated into

local cuisines and resulted in many cultivated varieties, thus beginning the world’s love affair with the pepper plant. *C. annuum* is believed to be the mother species from which most of our domesticated peppers were derived.

Capsicum annuum, aka **Chiltepin**, **Chiltecpin**, **Chile Pequin**, **Chilipiquin**, or **Bird Pepper** amongst others, is one of 27 varieties in the *Capsicum* genus, 5 of which are known to have been domesticated over the past several millennia. Capsicum is native to the New World with its greatest species diversity located in an area in central South America. ***C. annuum* var. *glabriusculum*** is the Chiltepin varietal that was domesticated in Mexico between 3400-5200 years ago with archeological evidence that it was collected in the wild and used as a spice as far back as 7200 years ago, making it one of the world’s oldest spices.

Nomenclature. The genus name *Capsicum* probably derives from the Greek word kapto meaning “to bite” referring to its biting taste. *Annuum* suggests the annual cycle of its flowering and fruiting, even though the plant growth cycle is that of a perennial in warm to moderate climates. The varietal designation of *glabriusculum* recognizes the “somewhat smooth” feel of its stems and leaves.

Continued on page 14

Continued from page 13

Capsicums are part of the *Solanaceae* family (Night-shades) which contains an interesting array of plants producing complex alkaloid chemicals (ex. belladonna) which are toxic or hallucinogenic as well as many of our edible vegetables (potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, etc.). You will see the scientific name of *C. annuum* attached to many other domesticated peppers, but usually with a varietal appendage (cayennes, pimentos, jalapenos, serranos, etc.).

The common name of *Chiltepin* or *Chiltecpin* comes from the Aztec language of Nahuatl. *Chil* was the name of chili plants and *tecpin* meant flea. Thus, one interpretation offers that the flea designation referred to the fact that the pepper was both small and biting like a flea. Ouch!

Distribution area. Because of its domestication and probable spread by human civilization, it is somewhat difficult to determine its original distribution geography. It certainly grew in Mexico, down into South America, in the Caribbean islands, and into the southern US. It can currently be found across the southern US and along the eastern seaboard, although possibly as a result of human transport. It is found sporadically in the southwest, often in association with pre-historic Amerindian settlements. In Texas, Chiltepin naturally grows in south Texas and along the Gulf Coast as far north as Austin at least.

Plant Characteristics and Growing Conditions. In Fredericksburg, Chiltepin is an herbaceous perennial that can survive our winters if protected from the north wind. I have two plants in a mulched bed that are protected by a wall and die back to their roots each winter but revive quickly in the spring growing to 30 inches tall by 30 inches wide. I have heard and read of plants in warmer Zone 9 climates that grow to 6 feet tall, since they do not suffer annual diebacks.

Chiltepin likes well-drained, slightly moist soils located in full sun to part sun exposure. My plants are irrigated once to twice weekly and receive about 6-8 hours of morning sun and seem to love that formula. They produce an undistinguished small yellowish white flower. The real show comes when it bursts forth with a plethora of pea-sized bright red peppers that are edible and popular with birds. The peppers mature successively over time, and some remain until



Continued on page 15



the first frost. It makes for a great ornamental plant and/or culinary/medicinal herb which will evoke some conversation when people view it in full pepper explosion. If you plant one in your landscape, the birds will spread the seed and ensure that you will have others, but not at problematic numbers.

Ethnobotany – Its uses as a culinary and medicinal herb. As I mentioned earlier, Chiltepin has a history of being the spice of choice amongst Amerindians of the southwest US and Central America dating back thousands of years. Imagine if you had a bland diet of beans, maize, and squash what a culinary enhancement of adding a little pepper would be. From the archeological record, its use seemed to be universal by cultures who had access to it.

Chiltepins have quite a pungent taste measuring 50,000-100,00 Scoville units, but it is also said to be “arrebataado” meaning it creates a hot sensation that disperses quickly. The tiny peppers and their maturation cycle do not make for a plant that is easily harvestable on an industrial scale, so the variety never made the jump to large-scale industrial production. In recent times, families still venture into the wild in Mexico when the peppers are ripe and pick basket loads for sale in the local market. Many Mexican or south Texas families also grow a plant or two in their home garden for personal use. Finally, another culinary choice would be to pick some peppers and place them in a bottle of vinegar for use as a pepper sauce said to be hotter than Tabasco sauce.

In the world of home health use, Chile peppers produce a chemical called Capsaicin which is well known as a topical pain reliever and treatment for arthritis. I can attest to its effectiveness, but it does burn at first! Peppers are also loaded with vitamins including having more vitamin C than an orange. Research has proven that they have beneficial effects in raising metabolism, reducing cholesterol, and improving heart health. I am not a doctor and not offering medical advice. But I will offer, eat more peppers!

Sources:

[Remarkable Plant of Texas – Uncommon Accounts of our Common Natives, Matt Warnock Turner](#)

[Peppers – the Domesticated Capsicums, Jean Andrews](#)

[Missouri Botanical Garden](#)

[Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)

Photo credits:

Chiltepin red pepper – Joe A. Marcus

Chiltepin flower w/ red & green pepper – Carolyn Fannon

Chiltepin bush w/ green peppers – Joe A. Marcus



Fredericksburg Nature Notes

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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 and support.
- **Membership management** - recruitment and support.
- **Programs** - Assist with planning and organizing workshops and children's activities.

Contact Gracie Waggener at 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

<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.

[*Click here to donate.*](#)

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