



Fredericksburg Nature Notes

Newsletter of the Friends of the
Fredericksburg Nature Center

October 2026 Volume 7 Number 10

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President's Message - Lonnie Childs

As I write this, we are enjoying an abundant rain that hopefully will not spill into an overabundant flooding condition. Soaking October rain serves as the catalyst for germinating Bluebonnet seeds and lays the foundation for a good spring bloom, which has not been the norm for the last several years in our area. Rain equals hope which of course "springs eternal in the human breast." We hope for the Bluebonnets and are disappointed if they do not thrive. All of nature benefits from rain, so expand your eye and broaden your appreciation for its cornucopia of benefits. There are other flowers to revel in and other needs to satisfy in Mother Nature's domain. Read about the Year of the Croton in the newsletter. As Thoreau said, "Shall I not rejoice also at the abundance of the weeds whose seeds are the granary of the birds?"

In November, we will be sponsoring another outstanding educational event that features Patsy and Tom Inglet with Sherie Gee. The Inglets bring a wealth of avian knowledge and always cloak it in humor and fun. Who is not inspired by the sight of a soaring raptor? Come to this workshop, and you will laugh your way to learning how to identify that raptor. You might have noticed that there is a charge for this event which is normally free. We are using this workshop as an FFNC fundraiser, so attending this class will increase your expertise and our financial capability to offer more great programs. Find all the information about how to register in the newsletter. Attendance is limited!

*Happy Nature Trails,
Lonnie*



Fredericksburg Nature Center Events



Pedernales Workshop

In the aftermath of catastrophic flooding over the past two years, local residents attended our recent workshop on the Pedernales River watershed. Lauro Martinez, Landowner Outreach and Stewardship Manager with the Hill Country Alliance, presented the reasoning and imperative for improved management of our landscape to protect our watershed. Participants learned specific techniques and methods to mitigate erosion and improve our landscape's capacity to retain and capture water in situ. He posited that a better term to describe our "watersheds" would be to call them

"catchments," which indicates how they should function in a healthy state.

Look for details to come concerning a Spring workshop in conjunction with HCA focused on Hillside Stewardship.

Photos by Lonnie Childs



FUNDRAISER FOR FREDERICKSBURG NATURE CENTER

RAPTORS

BIRDS OF PREY OF THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

Saturday - November 14, 2026 - 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

John Wm. Klein Room, Marketplatz, 115 N. Crockett, Fredericksburg

Guest Presenters - Patsy & Tom Inglet and Sherie Gee

Discover the remarkable raptors that call the Texas Hill Country home. Join FFNC, Patsy and Tom Inglet and Sherie Gee in exploring how to identify these magnificent birds, understand their behavior, and appreciate the vital role they play in our ecosystem. The Workshop will focus on 14 diurnal species of raptors commonly encountered in our area and will include general information on raptors as a distinctive bird group, information on ways to separate them into seven basic types, and tips on how to identify them to species using all the clues available in the field. The workshop will also include three hands-on activities created by Sherie Gee to help make the information easier to remember and use. In addition, all attending the workshop will receive a post-workshop digital resource package that will help them continue to expand and solidify their knowledge of raptors and increase their identification confidence. This program is approved for three (3) hours of Texas Master Naturalist Hill Country Chapter AT credit. Reserve your seat via the QR code or using the following Eventbrite reservation link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1999787952599?aff=oddtcreator>

LIMITED SEATING - RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!

TICKET PRICE: \$45.00

Tickets can be purchased through Eventbrite by scanning the QR code below with your camera phone. Seating is limited, so reserve your spot today!



All proceeds from this workshop go directly towards funding the educational programming provided by Fredericksburg Nature Center.



Nature Journaling

Bat, bat come under my hat.....

Rebecca Stapleton, TMN

And I'll give you a slice of bacon; and when I bake, I'll give you a cake, if I'm not mistaken! This was an 1842 children's nursery rhyme and game to try to catch a bat.

Bats have always been objects of fascination. Nursery rhymes and early turn of the century outdoor games, novels like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* published in 1897 about a vampire with the ability to change into a bat, horror movies and stories of witches have stoked the fire of superstition surrounding these amazing animals. Bats are an iconic symbol of Halloween!

In the state of Texas, there are over 30 different species of these very cool, flying mammals! The most common of these are the Mexican free-tailed bat and the Cave myotis bat. These are found in the Edwards Plateau and Hill Country, often sharing the same roosting sites. They form massive colonies in caves, old mines, railroad tunnels, under bridges and in abandoned buildings. They will adapt to inhabiting man-made bat houses as well.

The largest colony of these bats can be seen at Bracken Cave State Preserve, San Antonio. It houses around 20 million bats and is the world's largest known bat colony. Roosting colonies of the Mexican free-tailed bat and the Cave myotis bat share this cave, each species having a separate area within the cave. Mexican free-tailed bats require high humidity while Cave myotis bats do not need as much. Each finds its own nooks and crannies within the cave that meet their needs, while still keeping separate within the cave.

Females of both species give birth to one pup per year in early summer, nurturing and teaching it to be self-sufficient. Cave myotis bats are independent at 6 to 8 weeks of age. Mexican free-tailed bats are independent at 4 weeks.

Bats hunt by using echolocation - sound waves that bounce off objects in their environment, helping them to navigate around objects and to locate prey. Bat colonies are very beneficial, eating up to 30,000 pounds of insects a night. Mexican free-tailed bats leave to hunt at the onset of dusk while Cave myotis bats prefer to wait until it's fully dark. Both return to their roosting site at the onset of dawn.

While not endangered, they are protected as a species due to human encroachment on their habitat, vandalism, uncontrolled tourism, pollution, and harmful insecticide use by farmers and residents close to the habitat sites.

They are fun to watch, and nothing is more amazing to see than a “Batnado’, as they emerge from their roosting place in the evening, a huge vortex of bats pouring out from the entrance and dispersing into the dark to hunt! You can observe them in the spring and summer before they migrate to warmer places in the autumn, around November to Mexico and South America. In the case of Free-tailed bats and some Cave myotis bats, they choose to migrate to Mexico rather than hibernate in Texas over the winter. You can see them at Bracken Cave State Preserve, San Antonio.

It is advisable that you make reservations ahead of time for Bracken at bracken@batcon.org or [Old Tunnel State Park, Fredericksburg](#) or (830)997-6523. In Austin, visit the Congress Ave bridge at 305 S. Congress Ave on the shore of Lady Bird Lake. No reservations or fees required. Bring a chair or a blanket to sit by the lake.



**Bracken Cave State Preserve photo by Braden Stapleton, my grandson
(No flash photography was used for this photo)**

References: Nature Conservancy of Texas, AI, Texas Parks and Wildlife and Bat Conservation International of Texas



Interesting Plants of the Hill Country



Woolly Croton
(*Croton capitatus* var. *lindheimeri*)
Photo: Lonnie Childs

2026 – The Year of the Crotons? by Lonnie Childs

If you have recently driven any of the county roads, you may have noticed fields replete with dusky greenish gray plants that appear aggressive by their coverage. The weather has favored the various Croton species, and they have opportunistically responded.

Crotons are members of the diverse Euphorbia family (Spurges) and are annuals that generally inhabit prairies or woodland edges. Those brightly colored tropical species that you see in nurseries occupy the same genus! Our native Crotons are commonly referred to as Goatweed, Dove-weed, or One-seed Croton with the smallest species referred to as Prairie Tea. Considered to be undesirable weeds in pastures, their toxicity is debated, but consensus is that they can cause gut issues with cows and even goats. As noted, Crotons can be

aggressive spreaders on disturbed soils. However, their seeds are desirable food for dove & quail, & they serve as larval hosts for the aptly named Goatweed Leafwing butterfly. Crotons have their place in habitats but should be limited in population in a healthy prairie habitat.

For more information:

[Prairie Tea or One-Seed Croton](#)
[Woolly Croton](#)

[Texas Croton](#)
[Goatweed Leafwing](#)



**Prairie Tea or
One Seed Croton
(*Croton monanthogynus*)
Photo: Lonnie Childs**

**Texas Croton
(*Croton texensis*)
Photo: Robert L. Stone**

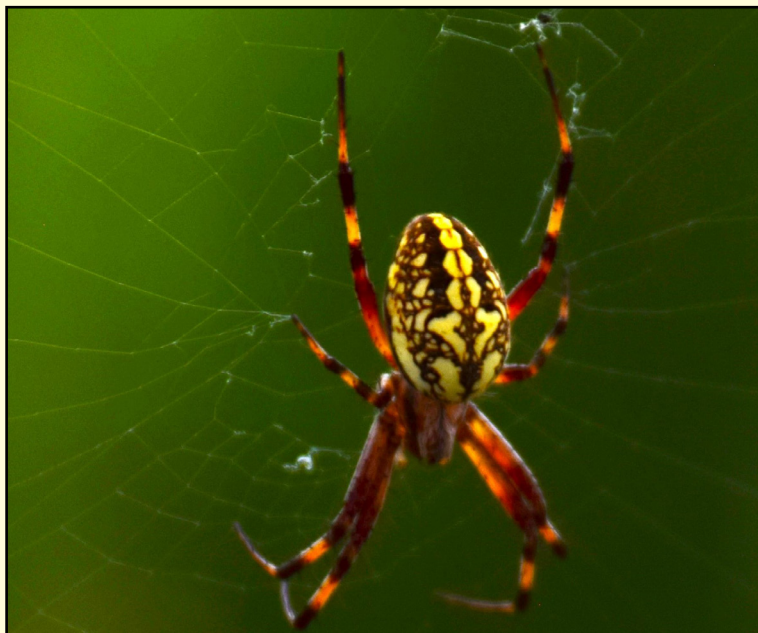


**Goatweed Leafwing
(*Anaea andria*)
Photo: Bill Lindemann**





Nature News



Western Spotted Orb Weaver
Neoscona oaxacensis
Photo: Deb Youngblood

Orb-Weavers: Architects of Autumn

by Barbara Shirley

By early fall, some of the most impressive structures in the Texas Hill Country are built overnight.

Orb-weaver spiders create the large, circular webs that appear between trees, across garden paths, and sometimes inconveniently across a porch or doorway. Their webs are especially noticeable in late summer and fall, when many orb-weavers have reached their adult size.

The familiar wheel-shaped web is a remarkable piece of engineering. Strong support threads form the framework, while a spiral of sticky silk captures flying insects.

Some orb-weavers repair damaged sections of their webs, while others consume much of the old web and build a new one, often during the evening or overnight.

Although their size can make them look intimidating, orb-weavers are generally harmless to people. They are not aggressive and would rather retreat than confront something as large as a human. They also provide a useful service around our homes and gardens by catching moths, flies, mosquitoes, and other insects.

Female orb-weavers are usually much larger and more conspicuous than males. By autumn, a large female sitting in the center of an elaborate web can be hard to miss. What may look alarming at first is actually one of nature's most skilled hunters waiting patiently for dinner to arrive. So, before sweeping away that enormous web you find one October morning, take a closer look. Its eight-legged architect may be one of the most interesting—and beautiful—neighbors sharing the Hill Country with us.

The Western Spotted Orb Weaver (*Neoscona oaxacensis*) is a large, colorful orb-weaving spider found across much of the western and southern United States, including Texas. It builds the familiar circular “orb” web, usually at night, where it catches moths, flies, and other insects. Its abdomen can vary in color but is often marked with bold spots and patterns that make it easy to recognize up close. Although its size can look intimidating, it is not considered dangerous to people and is a helpful garden predator. (See page 8 for a photograph).



Yellow Garden Spider (*Argiope aurantia*) is a large, striking orb-weaver commonly found in gardens, fields, and sunny areas across much of North America. Females are especially noticeable for their bold black-and-yellow markings and the distinctive zigzag of silk, called a stabilimentum, often woven into the center of their webs. They feed on insects such as grasshoppers, flies, beetles, and moths, making them useful natural pest controllers. Despite their impressive size and appearance, Yellow Garden Spiders are not considered dangerous to people and usually remain quietly in their webs unless disturbed.
Photo: Dot Maginot

“In my reverie, these orb-weaving spiders in the meadow are the wise grandmothers of myth that walk between worlds, weaving them together.”

— Mary Porter Kerns, from The Orb Weavers



Yellow Garden Spider (*Argiope aurantia*) with prey. Photo: Lonnie Childs

“A noiseless patient spider...” — Walt Whitman, A Noiseless Patient Spider



The Giant Lichen Orb Weaver (*Araneus bicentenarius*) is a large orb-weaving spider found in wooded areas across much of the eastern and central United States. Its mottled green, gray, brown, and white coloring helps it blend beautifully with lichen-covered bark. Like other orb-weavers, it builds a large circular web to catch flying insects, especially at night. Despite its impressive size, it is not considered dangerous to people and usually avoids contact.

Photo: Bill Lindemann



In the Garden

Trudy's Garden

by Lonnie Childs

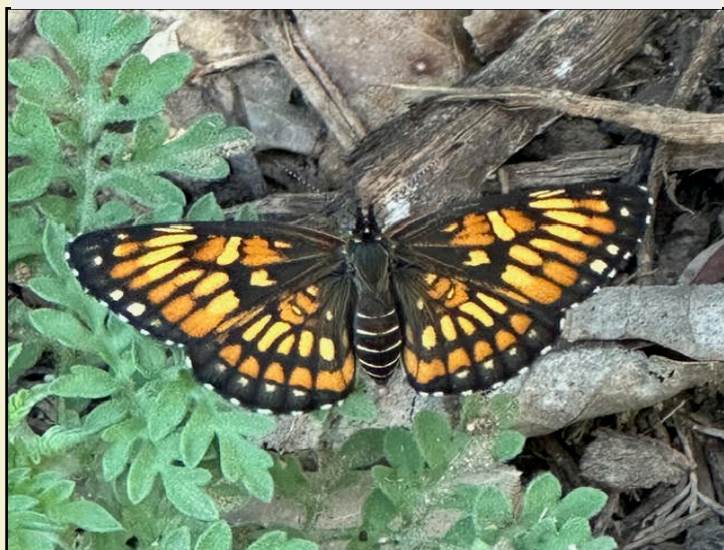
Garden created and maintained by Trudy Eberhardt

If you plant them, they will come. These pollinators are searching for some choice nectar, a host plant to lay eggs, and a sip of water along with a taste of minerals. They will return the favor with splashes of color, eye dazzling patterns, whispers of wingbeats, or buzzes of delight. Get your camera ready. You too can be a Pollinator Champion. Just ask Trudy.

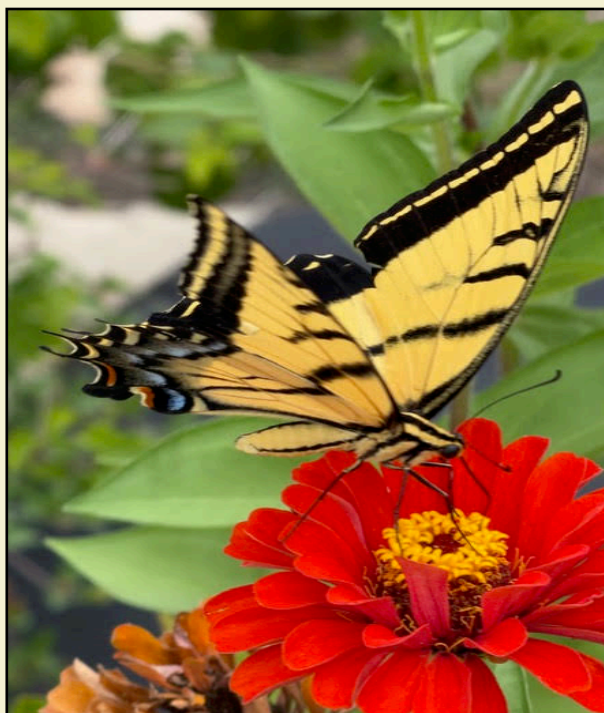
How do you install your own pollinator garden?

- Visit the Pollinator Garden at FNC and check out our information exhibit.
- Contact the [Pollinator Garden Assistance and Recognition Program](#) sponsored by your Hill Country Master Naturalist chapter and local NPSOT chapter. They can provide advice and assistance on how to start.
- Visit the [Native Plant Society of Texas \(NPSOT\)](#) state website for a list of resources about pollinator landscaping.

Theona Checkerspot (*Chlosyne theona*)



Photos by: Trudy Eberhardt



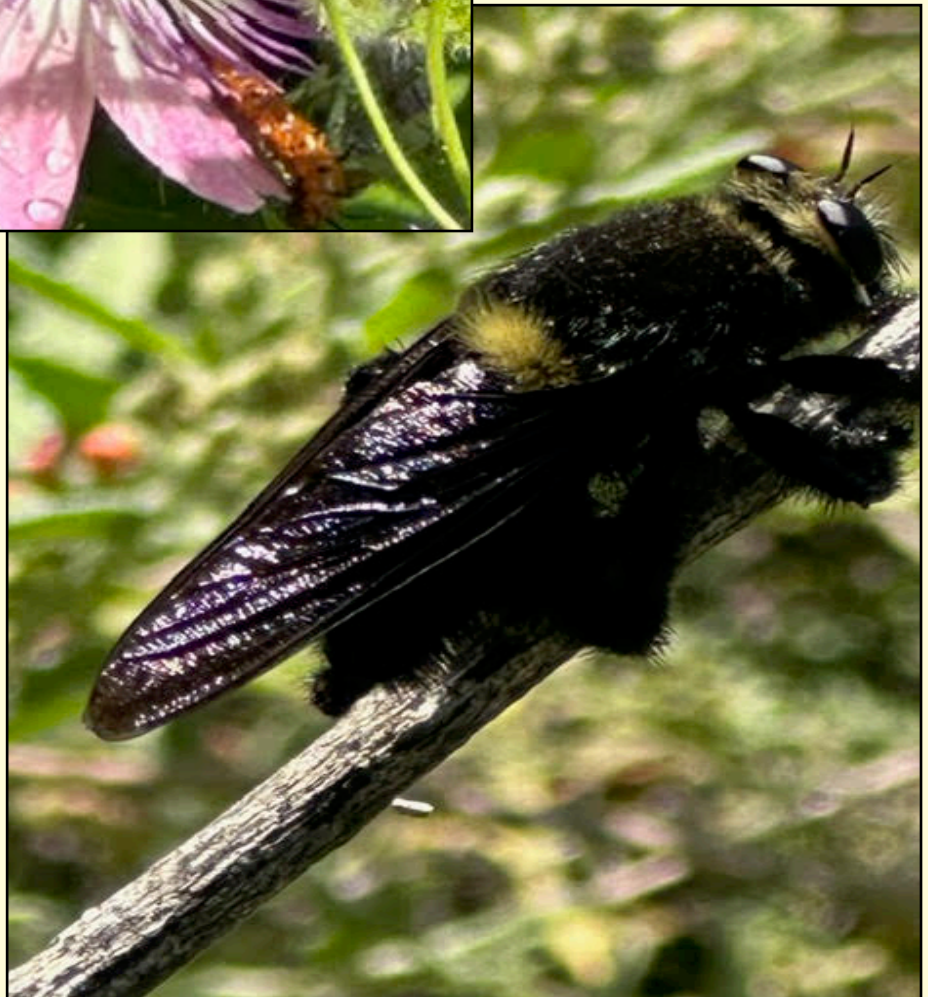
Two Tailed Swallow (*Papilio multicaudata*)



Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*) on Corona del Cristo (*Passiflora foetida*)

Beelzebub (*Mallophora leschenaulti*), also called the Belzebub bee-eater or black bee killer, is a massive, fuzzy species of robber fly in the family Asilidae

Photos by: Trudy Eberhardt





Feathered Neighbors

Egrets of Central Texas

By Lonnie Childs

If you spend any time perusing the shoreline of Live Oak lake at Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park for birds, two year-round denizens often seen are the Great Egret and the Great Blue Heron. Both occupy the same shallow aquatic habitat and exhibit similar hunting methods, standing stoically still waiting for their prey to move closer. Their similarities in physique and behavior stem from their common genetic inheritance.

Hérons, egrets, and bitterns are all classified within the 74 species found in the bird family Ardeidae, of which there are 12 species regularly found in Texas. The distinction between a heron and an egret is ambiguous and derives more from appearance than biology. The term “egret” originates from the French word “aigrette” that translates to both “silver heron” and “brush”, referring to the long, filamentous feathers that cascade down an egret’s back. Thus, “egret” has been used to describe species of the Ardeidae family that are white in color and sport the long, decorative “aigrettes” during breeding season, such as the Great Egret and Snowy Egret. In contrast, “heron” is often used to designate the larger, non-white members of the family.

Those decorative aigrettes almost resulted in the extinction of egrets in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as there was great demand for their plumes in the manufacture of women’s hats. Boston socialites Harriet Hemenway and her cousin Minna B. Hall created the Massachusetts Audubon Society in 1896 to halt the slaughter of egrets and other species for decorative feathers. This movement ultimately led to the formation of the National Audubon Society (NAS) and its genesis as an avian conservation organization. NAS lobbying efforts stimulated the passage of the Audubon Plumage Law in 1910 that protected wading birds from the depredations of the plume industry and the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act which made it illegal to kill any non-game bird in the U.S. Ironically, those aigrettes were the silver linings that saved our bird populations, after almost causing their extinction.

Following are the egrets and one heron that you might see on Live Oak lake.

“In the garden, egrets are doing their stalking dance, and it’s easy to see how they are really feathered dinosaurs flown in through a hole from the past.”

~ Tishani Doshi (Egrets, While War)



Great Blue Heron (*Ardea Herodias*) As the largest amongst this group, it shows a long neck and legs. They are bluish-gray in overall color with a long orangish-yellow bill and black crown and head plumes. We also have a year-round resident Great Blue at the lake.

Photo: Dot Maginot



Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) Largest of the white egrets with S-curved neck. Displays black legs with a yellow dagger-shaped bill.

Photo: Lonnie Childs



Western Cattle Egret (*Ardea ibis*) An even smaller species with a thick neck that is often retracted when perching. Breeding adults display buff coloring on their head, breast, and back with shorter yellow legs and bills. Contrary to a myth, they did not hitch a ride on a ship from their homeland in Africa to the Americas but rather flew over to south America via favorable trade winds and then north to the US by the early 1950s. Cattle Egret can be found following cattle which stir up insects for their culinary delight or perched on their back dining on ticks. Their alternative is to follow farm equipment that also stir up insects.

Photo: Bill Lindemann



Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) Smaller than the Great Egret and exhibiting a contrasting color pattern with a black bill, black legs and yellow feet. Gillespie County is within their migratory route. On September 29, fourteen individuals were hanging around Live Oak lake for at least the second day.

Photo: Bill Lindemann



Fredericksburg Nature Notes

Newsletter of the Friends of the
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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](#) to receive a weekly email notification about scheduled work tasks for the coming week.



For newsletter information, contact [Lonnie Childs](#) or [Barbara Shirley](#)

<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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