# HABITAT HERALD

*Wildlife Austin's monthly Newsletter*

AUSTIN PARKS & RECREATION
Cultural Places, Natural Spaces

Wildlife Austin
Keep Austin Wild

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Jan 5th -** Invasive species removal day at Blunn Creek with APF (RSVP required)
www.austinparks.org/eventinfo.html?eventkey=571

**Jan 12th** - Sapling planting at Bartholomew and Dottie Jordan Parks with TreeFolks
treefolks.org/calendar/

**Jan 12th -** Invasive species removal workday at Bouldin Creek with APF (RSVP required)
www.austinparks.org/eventinfo.html?eventkey=563

**Jan 25th -** Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop at Urban Roots $30 for non-members of TreeFolks
treefolks.org/programs/classes-workshops/

**Jan 26th -** Tree Talk Winter Walk at the Wildflower Center (free admission!)
www.wildflower.org/ttww/

**Jan 26th -** Republic Square workday with APF
www.austinparks.org/eventinfo.html?eventkey=556

# January 2013

Happy 2013 everyone! We made it through 2012 with no end of the world in sight. 2012 was a great year for Wildlife Austin and we are looking forward to making 2013 even better. In January everyone always talks about making New Year's resolutions. I thought it might be nice to come up with some easy resolutions for all of us to help out good old Planet Earth.

* **Grow Your Own or Eat Local!** - Having your own garden can be fun and rewarding. Check out aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/travis/lg_e_vegetables.htm for lots of great Central Texas-specific information on vegetable gardening. If you don't have the space or time for a garden join one of the many local Austin CSA's: www.edibleaustin.com/content/csas-resources-108
* **Save Water** - Check out the Austin Water Utility website austintexas.gov/department/simple-ways-save-water for some great tips and tricks that cost little or nothing!
* **Spend More Time Outdoors -** Make it a point to spend at least a few hours each day outdoors enjoying nature. We are so easily sucked into the "electronic abyss" these days we often let beautiful days pass us by without even realizing.
* **Reduce, Reduce, Reduce -** Try to reduce the amount of waste in your garbage can through composting, recycling, and consuming less. It's easy to do if you are determined. Check out Austin Resource Recovery's website for more info --> austintexas.gov/composting or austintexas.gov/what-do-i-do to learn about how to recycle, compost, or reuse specific items

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## Notes from Erin

Happy New Year everyone! I am sure that 2013 will be a great year for Wildlife Austin. Let's hope for lots of wonderful life-giving rain! If you haven't yet converted your yard to native plants, now is a great time to do so. Austin Water Utility is still accepting applications for the "Water Wise Landscape Rebate" program. Residential properties may receive $25 for every 100 sq. ft. converted from healthy turf grass to native plant bed and permeable hardscape with a maximum rebate amount of $1,250! To learn more visit:

www.austintexas.gov/department/waterwise-landscape-rebate

# The Heritage Tree Ordinance

Since the 70's, the Protected Tree Ordinance has required an approved Tree Permit to remove any tree 19 inches in diameter and larger. However, City's rules tended towards removing larger trees to preserve younger trees, and mitigating by planting replacement trees or contributing to a fund. This has resulted in an unbalanced tree canopy age distribution**:** There are only 5% heritage trees instead of the recommended 10%.

With strong community support, the Heritage Tree Ordinance (HTO) was approved in February 2010 to increase the preservation of heritage trees. The HTO prohibits removal of a heritage tree within city limits without an approved variance. Removal includes anything that would cause the tree to die, including root damage and pruning more than 25% live canopy. Heritage trees are 24 inches in diameter and larger, of the following native species: Texas Ash, American and Cedar Elm, Texas Madrone, Bigtooth Maple, all Oaks, Pecan, Arizona and Eastern Black Walnut, and Bald Cypress.

The HTO provides flexibility and does not stop development. The HTO requires that three conditions be met before a variance is granted: 1) The case meets the City Arborist's Criteria (tree is not dead or dying, irreparably damaged or a safety hazard, and does not prevent reasonable access or a reasonable use of property), 2) The applicant has demonstrated that the tree cannot be preserved by integrating it into the design, 3) The applicant has been denied all other variances, alternative compliance, waivers, etc. that could preserve the tree.

There are two processes to approve a variance: An administrative process for heritage trees 24 to 29.9 inches in diameter (measured 4.5 ft. from the ground), with the decision made by the City Arborist Office; and a public process for heritage trees with a single trunk 30 inches in diameter or larger, with recommendations made by the Urban Forestry and Environmental boards, and a decision made by either the ZAP or the Planning Commission.

**The HTO has worked extremely well to date and not a single variance has been approved to remove a healthy heritage tree.** The City Arborist Office has been successful in working at an early stage with the applicants, homeowners and developers, to incorporate the heritage trees in the design. During the first 18 months since the HTO was approved, the City Arborist Office reviewed about 1,000 administrative cases and about 1,000 development cases (each development case may involve several heritage trees) from many neighborhoods across Austin. About one third of these variances were approved because the trees were dead or in poor health.

Only five variances have gone to the boards and commissions. The first case was a retroactive variance because the developer damaged the roots during construction. Two variances were approved because the trees were in poor health. The applicant withdrew in one case because the tree was incorporated in the design.

There has been only one true heritage tree variance case, the Bowie St. tree. This variance was denied by the Planning Commission in 2011 because the developer's architect demonstrated that the tree could be incorporated into the design. The developer preferred to not incorporate the tree in the design and transplanted the tree to a corner of the property. The developer was required to implement a 5 year post-transplanting tree care plan approved by the City Arborist Office. It is best to incorporate the tree into the design, but transplanting may be an effective way to save some heritage trees. However, survival data is needed.

The HTO has changed the way developers approach their projects. For example, Design Workshop understood the importance of preserving heritage trees and worked with the City Arborist office at an early stage of the design, saving 66 heritage trees in the Lakeline Market development. Only 3 heritage trees in poor health were removed. The green canopy dropped from 50% to 25% due to development, but the most significant trees (heritage trees, trees of various sizes in good health and rare trees like large Post Oaks) were incorporated into the design, resulting in an attractive development. Austin needs to preserve heritage trees because they are the workhorses of the urban forest and provide the largest ecological benefits: A young tree provides about $10 yearly while a heritage tree provides $200-300 in benefits. Trees grow very slowly. A Live Oak reaches a 24 inches diameter in about 75 years. It will become harder for young trees to survive and reach heritage tree size due to climate change and drought. Street trees survive only 10-15 years due to the harsh conditions, poor soil quality and inadequate tree spacing and soil volume.

Please, report any concerns with heritage tree removal (including excessive pruning or root zone encroachment) to cityarborist@austintexas.gov .

*By Michael Fossum, Executive Director, Austin Heritage Tree Foundation, NWF Habitat Steward*

www.austinheritagetreefoundation.com

# Garden of the Month

*This month we feature the newly installed garden of Cascades Apartment complex. This project was led by Habitat Steward and Keep Austin Beautiful Community Programs Assistant Ivey Kaiser with the help of Habitat Steward David Boston.*

# Questions for the Gardener...

**Question:** How did the project get started?
**Ivey**: The idea for the communal Cascades Apartments' native plant garden came to me when I was thinking about projects to do for the Habitat Stewards program. There was an existing, empty garden bed at the apartment complex, so I immediately thought of having a planting day there to spruce up the common space of the apartment courtyard/pool area.

**Question:** Did you have trouble with the apartment complex management?
**Ivey:** Since the garden bed was already established and not looking very attractive when it was sitting empty, the apartment management staff were quick to approve my idea of planting native flowers and grasses there. They even provided us with the use of the office's hose to water the garden.

**Question:** How did you generate support within the community?
**Ivey:** After getting approval for the planting, I spread the word around by talking to my neighbors and sending out a volunteer call on the Habitat Stewards list serve. My neighbors, especially those with children, were excited to help. I also got responses from a few non-residents who came out to help plan the garden and offer us their knowledge of individual plant needs. I was very thankful for this, since I wasn't sure which plants would need more water than others or which plants would grow large and shade out other smaller plants. The volunteers really helped us make a successful layout.

**Question:** How did you fund the project?
**Ivey:** Fortunately this project did not require any funding! The garden bed was already in usable condition and the soil had been replaced just a year prior when some other residents planted a short lived vegetable garden. The plants were provided through Keep Austin Beautiful after receiving them from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. KAB occasionally gets donations of plants in the fall and spring to give to community projects or school gardens. We got very lucky with the timing and this donation! The tools and gloves that we used were also provided at no cost by Keep Austin Beautiful as a part of the Tool Shack Lending Program.

**Question:** What is your favorite thing about this garden?
**Ivey:** My favorite thing so far is that my neighbors helped put the plants in the ground. Hearing their questions and seeing the little things that they got excited over was amazing! The plants are already growing and showing some color. I am sure in the spring there will be much more color and lushness to the garden, and I'm excited to see people's reaction to that little bit of beauty near our homes.

**Question:** Have you gotten any feedback from the community since the planting?
**Ivey:** When I'm outside watering or weeding the garden I almost always get feedback from the residents! They stop and ask- "did you do this?" or "what's growing?" or "do you need any help watering?". It's great to see their interest and to hear people say thank you. I'm just glad they enjoy it!

**Question:** Any future plans to expand this garden or add another one on the property?
**Ivey:** Since this particular garden bed is surrounded by concrete we will not be expanding it, however some young men that live very close to the garden have showed interest in planting in another grassy area of the complex. My hopes are that we can plant some trees and more native plants in the spring in what could become more of an ongoing community garden area.

# Schoolyard Habitat Update

## The Martin Schoolyard Habitat is Underway!

Martin Middle School in Austin ISD broke ground in November on their new Schoolyard Habitat! With the help of Martin Middle School teachers and students, Keep Austin Beautiful, and volunteers from Dell the new trail was lined and filled! Three new vegetable gardens were also built and filled with soil. This habitat is designed to encourage more than one style of gardening by integrating native plants with vegetable gardens. It will also serve as a great place for Martin students to interact with nature while supplementing their learning. Schoolyard habitats teach students about the components of an ecosystem, what organisms need for survival, biotic and abiotic factors, and much more!

**Thank you Dell!**

## Schoolyard Habitat Success Depends on Volunteers Like You!

Contact Anne Muller AISD Outdoor Learning Specialist
amuller@austinisd.org or 841-5070
For an up to date list of work days and volunteer opportunities

# Tree Talk Winter Walk

Come explore and enjoy the new Texas Arboretum during Tree Talk Winter Walk! The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's annual Tree Talk Winter Walk is free admission and is a perfect time to explore the beauty and benefits of native trees and shrubs while learning how to identify, select and plant them. Take this opportunity to replace non-natives with hardy Texas natives and plant a few more for the future.

*There are also native plants and shrubs for sale!*

www.wildflower.org/ttww/

## Would YOU like to receive the the Wildlife Austin newsletter electronically?

Simply e-mail us at **wildlife@austintexas.gov**!

# Citizen Science and You!

Looking for ways to volunteer in Austin? Want to be involved in important science projects where the data that you collect matters? Then citizen science is for you! There are many opportunities to get involved in these types of projects. I have compiled a list and I urge you to check them all out. You never know what you might discover, and what it might mean to the larger picture of conservation...

**TPWD Texas Nature Trackers** - survey box turtles, amphibians, hummingbirds, mussels and more!
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/texas_nature_trackers/

**Texas Invasives Watch** - Learn to detect and track invasive species online or through a workshop.
www.texasinvasives.org/invaders/index.php

**Project FeederWatch** - Join the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in this nation-wide survey of winter birds. You can be an important part of this project and you don't even have to leave the comfort of your home.
www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/

**Dragonfly Pond Watch** - You can register your very own pond to be part of this project led by the Migratory Dragonfly Partnership. Track the migrating dragonflies and have fun in the process!
www.migratorydragonflypartnership.org/index/dragonflyPondWatch

**Monarch Larvae Monitoring Project** - This project involves volunteers from across the United States and Canada in monarch research. It was developed by researchers at the University of Minnesota to collect long-term data on larval monarch populations and milkweed habitat.
www.mlmp.org/

**Firefly Watch** - Are fireflies disappearing? In the summer you can count fireflies right in your own backyard and help get to the bottom of this ecological riddle.
legacy.mos.org/fireflywatch/

## "Like"

Austin Parks and Recreation on Facebook and look for the Wildlife Austin posts!

The City of Austin is proud to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you require assistance for participation in our programs or use of our facilities, please call (512) 974-6700.