HABITAT HERALD

Wildlife Austin's monthly Newsletter

AUSTIN PARKS & RECREATION
Cultural Places, Natural Spaces

Wildlife Austin
Keep Austin Wild

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Wildlife Austin
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UPCOMING EVENTS

June 2nd
The 3rd Annual Mueller Garden walking tour. For more information contact:
Helen Mason

June 5th
TPWD Amphibian Workshop. Registration required. Contact:
Kathy McCormack
512.698.9880

June 9th
KAB clean up of Lady Bird Lake! Registration required:
www.keepaustinbeautiful.org/LBLJune2012

June 9th & 10th
18th Annual Austin Pond Society Pond Tour! Should be a great tour this year! Check out:
www.austinpondsociety.org
For more information!

June 13th
Habitat Steward Native Plant Maintenance Class! Spots still available, contact:
wildlife@austintexas.gov

JUNE 2012

Greetings everyone! Summer is here, and we're already feeling the heat! Summer can be a tough time for plants and for our gardens in general. It's important to remember not to plant anything in the summer. Now is a great time to sit back and assess. Think about plants you might want to add in the fall, once the heat dies down. Hopefully we will continue to get a decent amount of rain this year, and things will continue to thrive! In the meantime here are some things you can do this summer...

Become a Firefly Watcher!

In 2008 the Museum of Science in Boston launched the first ever Firefly Watch! This is a citizen-science program aimed at finding out if firefly populations are in decline. Check out the website:

www.mos.org/fireflywatch/

You can join the watch by signing up on the website. If your yard is a bit more wild, the chances of firefly visitors increase. By signing up you register your habitat (aka your backyard) and fill out the data sheet provided each time you look for fireflies. It's fun and your sightings get added to an online nationwide map!

Help Fight Texas Invasives!

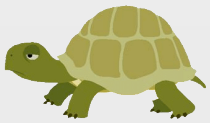
The Invaders of Texas Program wants YOU! This program trains citizen scientists to detect the arrival and dispersal of invasive species in their own local areas. There is a workshop coming up on June 16th at the Wildflower Center. Or, you can take the training online! Visit the website to sign up:

www.texasinvasives.org/invaders/index.php

Become a Texas Nature Tracker!

Another great citizen science program. Report your sightings of different species of Texas wildlife and make a difference! Visit the website for more info:

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/texas_nature_trackers/



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Notes from Erin

Greetings everyone! I hope everyone is staying cool and drinking lots of water. You may notice that parts of the newsletter look a little different than previous issues. I am still tweaking with the format to make this the best, and the best looking, newsletter it can be! Please feel free to give me your comments or suggestions at:

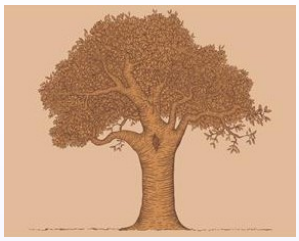
wildlife@austintexas.gov

Also, do you enjoy writing? Do you have an interesting point of view. Please consider contributing to our newsletter. Wildlife Austin is always looking for interesting and fresh perspectives about Austin area environmental issues. I want to hear from you!

Focus on Austin Natives

Our Wonderful Shade Trees

By Nina Hawkins



It's hard to believe that a mere month ago I was cursing the two large pecan trees in my front yard, who had rained down pollen so profusely that our lawn, porch and driveway was brown with decaying catkins. Now that the spring tree pollination frenzy is over and the sun more intense - we've cleaned off our sticky lawn chairs and pulled out the kiddy-pool to enjoy lazy summer afternoons under the shade of those same pecans. We are not the only wildlife enjoying the hospitable shade. Woodpeckers, wrens, warblers and gnatcatchers love foraging for insects among the branches and, when fall approaches, squirrels, grackles, blue jays and even green parrots will feast on the nuts that are only just beginning to form.

In wildlife gardening, the importance of planting small flowering trees, shrubs, and flowers is usually emphasized because these plants provide much of the nectar, berries, and protection that attracts all manner creatures to forage and raise young within view of your patio. But one glance at any yard certified as a wildlife habitat will tell you that shade trees are the backbone that supports all this life. Beneath the inviting shade of pecans grow French mulberries and yaupons, whose berries will turn bright purple and red before being eaten by birds in winter. A 60-foot tree across the street is host to a trumpet creeper that invites hummingbirds to zip in and out of its branches to drink nectar. Even the under-appreciated hackberry provides excellent shade under which turks caps, cedar sage, and heart-leaf scullcap flourish - attracting butterflies, bees, moths and hummingbirds. And each of these majestic trees is a larval host to one insect or another - providing a hearty meal for insectivorous birds.

Now is not the time to plant shade trees, but to plan for them. While you sit in your own shady spot - cold drink in hand - dream about where you might like to sit in 10 or 20 years. Maybe you'd like a semi-evergreen live oak or Monterrey oak north of your house to provide shade in summer and a wind-break in winter. Or a stand of towering cedar elms to the south to give high shade in summer, but welcome the warm winter sunlight. Chances are, we could all use a broadly branching bur oak, pecan or ash tree along the street to make the whole block a nicer place to chat with neighbors or walk the dog. And when you come to a decision about what tree you're going to plant where, resolve to plant it in October, and keep on relaxing in the shade of that great big tree.

Nina Hawkins is the Associate Director of TreeFolks

Focus on Austin Invasives

Pernicious Pigs...

By David Morgan

Photo by David Morgan

If you live in Texas you've probably heard, read, or seen something about Feral Hogs (*Sus scrofa*) in the past few years. It is important not to confuse feral hogs with the Texas native collared peccary or javelina (*Pecari tajacu*), which is not actually a pig. The exotic invasive feral pig originally came from Europe and Asia, and was brought to North America by early settlers. Early Spanish explorers and colonists were the first to bring hogs to Texas, and overtime many were released or escaped accidently and became feral. Later in the 1930's sportsmen released hogs for hunting purposes as well. Feral hogs can quickly increase their population. Sows can start breeding at 6 months old, have up to 12 piglets per litter (with possibly 2 litters per year), and they have very few predators.

With those numbers in mind, it's not surprising that in Texas we have a whole lot of feral hogs – an estimated 1.5 million in fact! Every year the feral hogs cause millions of dollars of damage to agriculture, livestock, landscaping, and wildlife habitats due to their destructive and powerful rooting/digging feeding style and muddy wallowing. The hog also competes with native species for food resources. Feral hogs primarily eat plants, roots, fruits, acorns, insects, and grubs, but they are opportunistic feeders as well. They will depredate eggs or chicks of ground nesting birds, and even devour young deer fawns or lambs. Feral hogs can also carry diseases such as pseudorabies, swine brucellosis, and trichinosis which may pose harm to livestock or humans. In some places, hunting and trapping efforts are helping to keep populations at manageable levels, but these methods can be costly and must be maintained year round to make an impact on local populations. Many universities and state agencies are researching the impacts and creating management strategies for feral hogs. Feral hogs can be an issue for some Austin homeowners (depending on where you live), and they are causing big problems in the Texas Hill Country.

David Morgan is graduate student at Texas State University and works out at Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge

Garden of the Month

This month we feature the truly amazing garden/backyard preserve of Jim and Lynne Weber! The Weber's were nice enough to contribute some of their own photos so we decided to expand the photo portion of the "Garden of the Month" section. So enjoy and perhaps be inspired by this amazing wildlife habitat!

Welcome to Woody Hollow!

Yes, it IS a Golden-cheeked Warbler! No big deal, just one of the many avian visitors to the Weber's habitat.

Pipevine Swallowtail Caterpillar

Beautiful Scarlet Clematis

The happy gardeners in their natural habitat

Blooming Basket Flower

This owl box was home to a family of Eastern Screech Owls this year

View from the back porch

Winding steps on their backyard trail

Questions For the Gardners...

Texas Alligator Lizard

Monarch chrysalis

Question: What is the story of your property?

The Webers: We purchased the 0.18 acre lot in 2004 on which we built our 4-star green house. We thought it backed to greenbelt, but found that the 8 acre canyon behind all the houses on our side of the street still belonged to the developer (and the thousands of acres behind that is Forest Ridge, one of the tracts of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve System). We contacted him (he had retired and moved to Oregon), and he sold the property to us for only $3500! After landscaping the house lot with all native plants and adding a moving water feature, we turned our attention to the 8 acres we named Woody Hollow. We removed several tons of garbage, many invasives such as ligustrum, china-berry, nandina, and Chinese tallow and installed over 100 stone steps, two wooden footbridges and a stone low water crossing over the creek, and cut in over a mile of trails, all by hand. Since we have nesting Golden-cheeked Warblers on our property, we established a conservation easement on Woody Hollow, held with with the Travis County Natural Resources Division, which now counts the property as part of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve System.

Q: What is your favorite thing about your garden?

W: We love the fact the water and the native plants and trees attract all sorts of wildlife. We keep lists of what we see, and so far we have observed well over 200 species of plants, 101 species of birds, 78 species of butterflies, and 22 species of reptiles/amphibians. It's a real learning experience when we see something new, as it peaks our curiosity, and we welcome seeing the repeat visitors, too, so we can learn more about them. Observations of one species leads to another and another, and before you know it you understand a bit more about the local ecosystem and how it all fits together. (And that's just when we have time to sneak a peek, since we both work full-time for IBM!)

Q: What issues with invasives have you faced?

W: Unfortunately, we have the typical problems with invasive plants (such as those mentioned above). While we have removed the majority of them, we're always on the lookout for either new species or new occurrences of known species, as invasives can spread easily and by many methods. Invasives extend to animals, too, as we have been routinely visited by feral hogs, who love our wet drainage and take the opportunity to root up large patches of native plants and disturb the soil, turning our clear creek into a muddy mess.

Q: What advice would you give to someone who was just starting to garden with native plants?

W: As habitat stewards, we've helped many friends and neighbors switch from non-native lawns and gardens to native ones. First, you should understand what goals you want from your garden and how you'd like to enjoy it. Second, study the property itself (do you need to remove invasives? which areas get the most sun or shade? do you have clay soils or limestone bedrock? etc). Third, consult an expert, whether it be a place (the Wildflower Center), a nursery (The Natural Gardener), a person (NWF Habitat Stewards or a landscaper than specializes in native plants), or references (books, online resources, etc) ....or most likely a combination of all the above. And lastly, start with just a small part of your yard, and learn what works and what doesn't, as you start the journey of providing food, water, cover, and places for wildlife to raise young. And remember, like other gardens, a wildscape is never done; it is always evolving, and that's part of the discovery process!

American Beautyberry

Cliff Chirping Frog

Neon Skimmer

Schoolyard Habitat Update

By Anne Muller (AISD Outdoor Learning Specialist)

The Austin Independent School District (AISD) is proud to partner with the National Wildlife Federation to install Schoolyard Habitats on many of our campuses. Schoolyard habitats offer space for students to engage in the natural world around them. These habitats allow for interdisciplinary learning that is hands on and inexpensive. They provide increased resources and opportunities for creative instruction and act as a living laboratory for our campuses.

Spotlight Campus: Paredes MS

Bringing the classroom outdoors is second nature at Paredes Middle School. Paredes is a true model in AISD with their integration of useable classroom space, a natural habitat and solar technology.

The outdoor classroom in action!

Schoolyard habitat with solar powered learning space nearby

Looking for volunteer opportunities?

Summer's here and the following schools need your help with summer maintenance:

Bedichek MS	**Fulmore MS**	**Pleasant Hill ES**	**Gorzycki MS**	**Covington MS**
Murchison MS	**Garcia MS**	**Webb MS**	**Martin MS**	**Paredes MS**
Brooke ES	**Widen ES**	**Zavala ES**	**Ortega ES**	

For more information contact Anne Muller: amuller@austinisd.org or 512-841-5070

Tips for Living Green - Recycling Reminder

By Dale Bulla

I have noticed that many Austinites are not aware of the restrictions on plastic bags for the blue recycling bins. Even though it is on the label fastened to the lid, some have not noticed that Styrofoam and plastic bags should go in the trash not the recycling. Of course the preferable choice is to put the plastic bags with your plastic grocery bags and recycle them at any grocery store.

I have learned from the single stream folks that any recyclables in a plastic bag will be discarded in the pre sorting process and go to the landfill. Also, there is a good chance that if a truckload has lots of plastic bags, the entire load could be discarded. The plastic bags evidently clog up the whole automated sorting process and it takes quite a while to remove the plastic bags from the huge teeth that shred the recyclables. So please tell your neighbors and friends that plastic bags should go into the trash or be recycled at HEB!

Nature Watch Austin by Lynne and Jim Weber

If you are not already aware, the Weber's have a great book out called **Nature Watch Austin: Guide to the Seasons in an Urban Wildland**, published last fall by Texas A&M University Press**.** In their own words:

We've compiled some of our work into a book titled . Each chapter is a different month, and highlights the things you can see (and do) in nature in Austin and surrounding areas. Even large cities harbor wildlife and support a community of native plants, and if you know when and where to look, you can learn the annual rhythms of our urban wildlands, get in tune with the natural cycles, and welcome the opportunities to enjoy it year after year!

It's a wonderful book and I highly encourage you to pick up a copy and enjoy the nature of Austin!

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

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

A National Wildlife Refuge Right in Our Own Backyard!

In Austin we are lucky! Not only do we live in an amazing, progressive, vibrant city, but we also have a National Wildlife Refuge less than an hour away! If you haven't visited **Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge** you are missing out! The refuge is 23,815 beautiful acres of Hill Country paradise! Featuring Ashe Juniper and Oak woodlands, and sprawling open savannah, the BCNWR provides nesting habitat to the endangered Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler. Approximately 240 other bird species visit the refuge during the year as well, and due to its value to our neo-tropical migrants, the BCNWR has been designated as a Globally Important Bird Area.

If you are interested in volunteering here, check out the Friends of Balcones Canyonlands website (www.friendsofbalcones.org/) to learn more! Or if you just want to visit and enjoy the refuge has a great website (www.fws.gov/refuge/Balcones_Canyonlands/) that will give you all the information you need! Either way you are sure to realize just how lucky we are in Austin to have the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge right in our own backyard!

TREEFOLKS

TreeFolks is a wonderful organization in Austin! Since 1989 TreeFolks has planted 250,000 trees in and around Austin at schools, parks, in medians, right of ways, community gardens and greenbelts. Check them out online:
www.treefolks.org

"Like"

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

Wildlife Austin

AUSTIN RANGER

CITY OF AUSTIN FOUNDED 1839

Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies CAPRA ACCREDITED

AUSTIN PARKS & RECREATION Cultural Places, Natural Spaces

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.