



Naturalist Notes



Left to right - Mournful Thyris Moth, Lorraine Cherry Nature Preserve; Dayflower, Buffalo Bayou Park; Aztec Houston dancer, Lantrip ES; Fiery Searcher Beetle, Herman Brown Park. All images Irmí Willcockson

ANNUAL MEETING CALL FOR PRESENTERS IS OPEN

Submit an abstract to present by May 15th. Check Mary Pearl's email for further details and a link to submit.

APRIL CHAPTER MEETING IS AT HOUSTON BOTANIC GARDEN

We will meet at the Houston Botanic Garden Thur, April 6th, starting at 6:30 pm.

PLANT SALES

Native plant sales are a great way to get plants for your garden while supporting one or more local organizations. Upcoming Spring plant sales include:

- HANC 3/24 and 3/25
- Mercer 3/24 and 3/25
- NPSOT-Clear Lake 4/15



Prescribed Burn at Sheldon Lake SP

The staff at Sheldon Lake State Park along with the prairie restoration team of volunteers were very happy a prescribed burn took place the afternoon of March 1, 2023. The last burn occurred late 2019. We also think those sections of the prairie impacted were pleased to experience this vital occurrence in the restoration process.

The TPWD Fire Team and Staff reviewed possible options in the morning and the conditions for a burn in a specific section turned favorable around noon. An estimated 300 acres were burned. Those sections not burned will roll into plans for scheduled burns in the future. It is a continuous process.

John Egan

ORGANISM OF THE MONTH**MABEL ORCHARD ORB WEAVER (*Leucauge argyrobapta*)**

The Mabel Orchard Orb Weaver (*Leucauge argyrobapta*) is a species of long-jawed orb weaver found from the northern USA to as far south as Brazil. It lives in moist areas, woods, gardens, and sheds.

The Mabel Orchard Orb Weaver is from the only spider family to receive its nomenclature from Charles Darwin. Darwin first discovered a spider in Brazil in 1832 during his voyage on the H.M.S. Beagle. It didn't fit into any previously noted genus, so he classified it under *Leucauge* (Greek-derived, *Leucauge* means "with a bright gleam" and *argyrobapta* means "baptized with silver"). This has become one of the largest groups of spiders currently documented.

The Mabel Orchard Orb Weaver's body and legs have an emerald hue, the thorax is orange. The abdomen is silvery-white, usually with some striping and stippling on top while the bottom is dark green with several bright orange spots. Because of those spots, people sometimes mistake them for black widows, but orb weavers are much smaller, more brightly colored, and more thinly built than black widows.

Like all other orb weavers, the Mabel Orchard Orb Weaver venom is not deadly to humans. They rarely bite anything other than their prey. In fact, these spiders are efficient at pest control and are welcomed in agriculture to reduce pests that would otherwise destroy crops. They are also highly effective against mosquitoes.

For more information, see <https://www.inaturalist.org/taxa/776900-Leucauge-argyrobapta>

Willow Waterhole Update

Willow Waterhole Greenway in southwest Houston is more than 300 acres of greenspace with 6 detention lakes. New trails are slated to open around the lakes in 2023. The construction contract for the Westbury Lake trail, funded by the Harris County Flood Control District, has been approved.

The future of nearly 29 acre site formerly owned by Shell Oil adjacent to Westbury Lake could become clearer in 2023 as well. Renamed the Energy Capital Park, possible uses include an entertainment venue.

If you've never visited Willow Waterhole, I recommend you check it out. The site of bird and butterfly counts has much to offer in the Spring and early summer.

Calling all poets and poetry lovers

April is National Poetry Month. Please send me suggestions for poets and poetry books to include. If you've written a poem you would like to share, please do send that as well.

Texas State Parks that are Leased

The recent closure of Fairfield SP prompted a closer look at state parks that are not owned by TPWD. The table below lists the park and the owner of the land. Please note that none of the parks listed are currently in danger of closing.

State Park	Landowner
Atlanta	US Army Corps of Engineers
Cedar Hill	US Army Corps of Engineers
Choke Canyon	US Dept of the Interior
Cooper Lake	US Army Corps of Engineers
Eisenhower	US Army Corps of Engineers
Lake Casablanca International	Webb County
Lake Colorado City	TX Electric Service Company
Lake Somerville	US Army Corps of Engineers
Lake Tawakoni	Sabine River Authority
Lake Whitney	US Army Corps of Engineers
Martin Dies Jr	US Army Corps of Engineers
Monahans Sandhills	Ward County
Ray Roberts Lake	US Army Corps of Engineers, Dallas, Denton
An Angelo	US Army Corps of Engineers

Source: Shaneica Holmes-Brown, Houston Chronicle, 2/23/2023

Chapter Project Update - Lantrip Pocket Prairie

March 4th - On this beautiful Saturday morning, school volunteers along with Della Barbato, Irmi Willcockson, Teresa Holbrook and her daughter (on her birthday!) came out to put down cardboard, fill the prairie with soil, and place decorative edging. We were done in less than 2 hours!



Next, Aztec Houston invited us to participate in an Indigenous land blessing. We circled the prairie, thinking good thoughts about this new classroom and sprinkling cedar. Then the group performed a short series of dances, ending with Tlaloc, the rain dance. What an honor to participate in this ceremony connecting us back to the land.



Fifty Years of Monarch Observation from Houston to Minnesota

Around 1968, I developed an interest in butterflies. My father was a scientist, and he nurtured my interest. He got me a net, chloroform for a killing jar, insect pins, and most importantly, the *Butterflies and Moths: Golden Press Nature Guide*. I carried this with me every summer for years. He showed me how to use the killing jar, a relaxing jar and mounting board. I had quite the collection by the time I was 12. About this time, I no longer wanted to kill them but I still wanted to observe.

Living in Houston, I would see quite a variety every spring through fall. What fascinated me the most was the Monarch migrations. I believe it was in October. Until the late 1970's, the sky would be full of Monarchs for around three or four days. The most intense migration I witnessed was in 1972. There had to be hundreds of thousands of them flying south right over my neighborhood. Starting in the latter half of the 1970's, I stopped seeing them. I don't know if it was a loss of habitat from urban development, migratory pattern change or the climate starting to change. Perhaps it was a combination.

My parents are from the Midwest and every summer we would drive the station wagon from Houston to northern Minnesota to visit numerous relatives. The ditches were always full of Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), and I showed my cousins how to find Monarch caterpillars. We would take a few of the caterpillars and feed them in a jar to observe them from larva to pupa to butterfly. The chrysalis is a very pretty light green with small gold dots. In a couple weeks the chrysalis becomes clear and the butterfly emerges. This is a beautiful sight that everyone should experience.

Decades later, I took a road trip in June of 2022. I didn't see any milkweed until I reached Iowa. Unlike my childhood trips where I remember seeing it by the time we reached southern Kansas. When I arrived at my cousin's home in northern Minnesota, I was determined to repeat the experiment and find a few caterpillars. The milkweed was sparse, and we couldn't find a single caterpillar. We managed to find a single egg which hatched the next day. By the time I had to leave, the caterpillar wasn't even a half inch long. My cousin fed it and sent me a picture at release time.

I don't know if the common milkweed is affected by climate change, herbicide use, or both. It's mostly farmland from Oklahoma to Minnesota and I've read horrible things about dicamba use. Whatever the case, the Monarch is in trouble. I hope they can adjust and rebound because it would be tragic to lose these magnificent creatures.





Text and Pictures by Adam Skjonsby. Captions: Day One (shot with iPhone 11 and Xenvo lens attachment), next day, tiny, 2 weeks later!

IN MEMORIAM - GREG BRAZAITIS

Greg Brazaitis passed away Friday, March 17th, 2023. His memorial service will be Sunday, March 26th at 2 pm at First Methodist Church (Downtown), 1320 Main Street.

Condolences to Marcy and the family.

Greg was a member of the Spring 2018 Training Class. He is the seventh person from the left standing on the ground with his baseball cap.

