



NATURALIST NOTES

APRIL 2024

Taking the Magnolia

*Always, I'd say of this slow
Upwelling: flames
Of white, purple – Royal*

*Purple, they called
this magnolia –
the winds shivered, split*

*to its drought-splintered
Crotch. The tree
will not make it*

*a fifteenth, a twentieth
winter.*

Paisley Rekdal

April is National Poetry Month

I've been binging
on poetry. Bringing
books into our
home, bound
windows into other
minds. I've been
binging on poetry.
Beginner lines,
indifferent rhymes,
written as windows
into my mind. I've
been binging on
poetry.

No regrets.

Irmi Willcockson



April is Bioblitz Month at NDC. No event is associated, just go out and take pictures and upload to iNaturalist.

Check out our website

<https://txmn.org/gulfcoast>



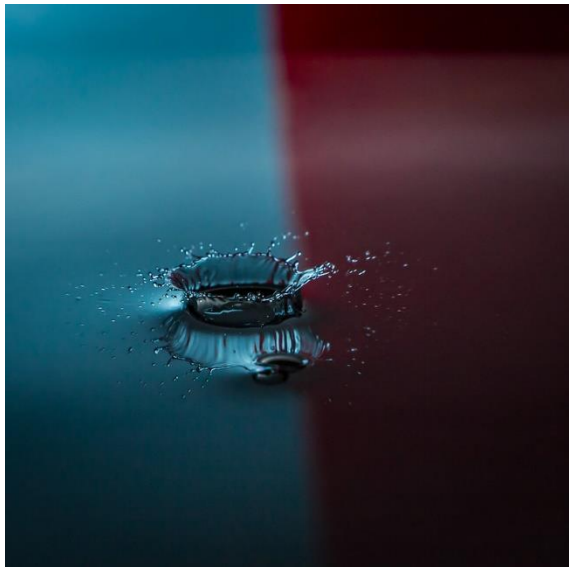
Patterns in Nature - Radial Symmetry

Cut an orange slice and look at it from the top. The slice is radially symmetrical, meaning it can be divided into identical halves using multiple lines crossing in the center.

Radial symmetry is most suitable for three types of animals - sessile animals such as the sea anemone, floating animals such as jellyfish, and starfish and other slow-moving animals. Some of these animals are bilaterally symmetrical in the larval stage and transition to radial symmetry as adults.

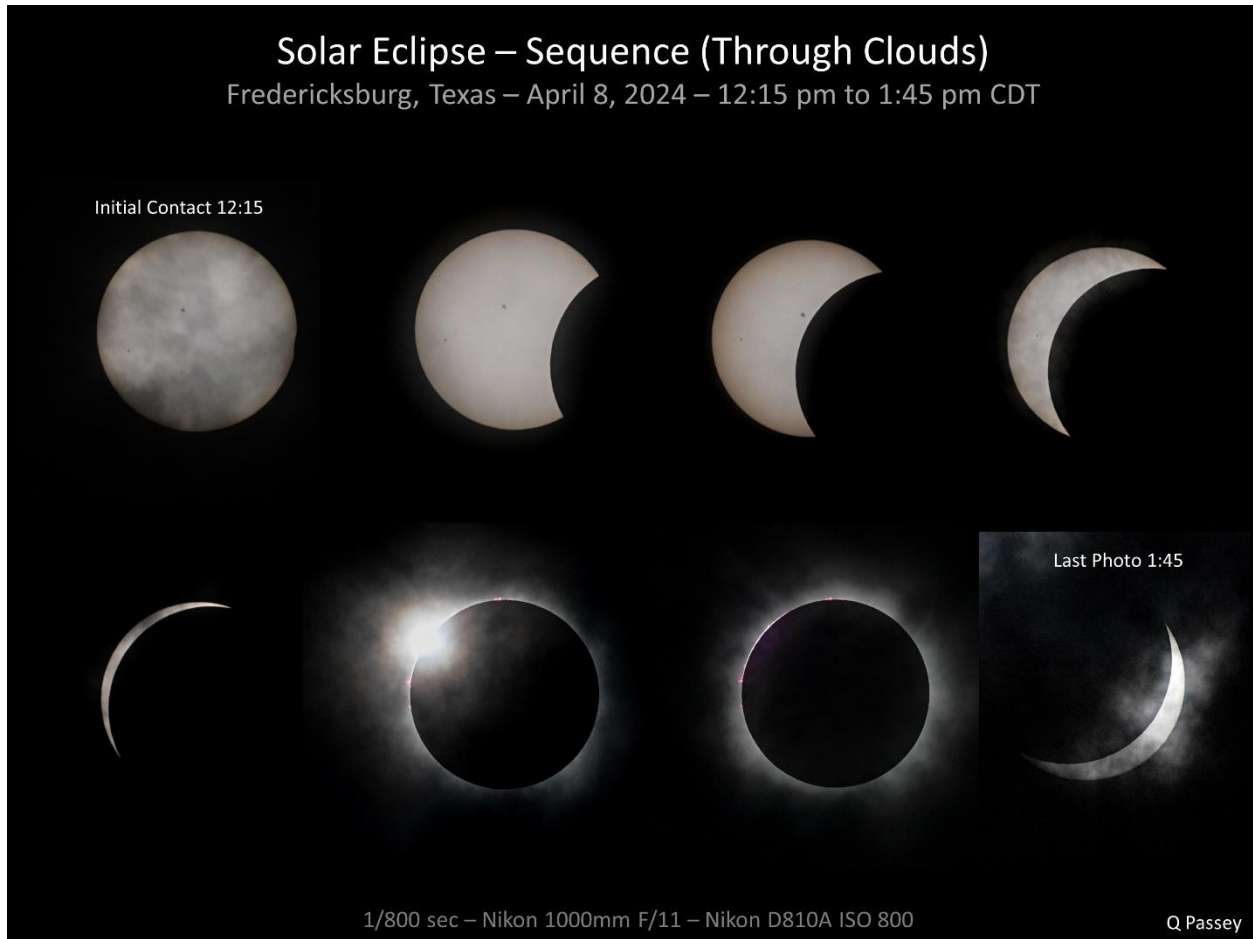
Animals are not the only organisms with radial symmetry. Mushroom caps and flowers share this symmetry, although the rest of organism may have bilateral or no symmetry at all.

Water falling into water also creates a radially symmetrical pattern. However, as soon as splashes appear, strict radial symmetry is broken.



Water Drop by Gerlos, flickr.com

Symmetry is just one of the patterns in nature. Next months we'll explore spirals. If you have a chance to see a fern leaf before it unfurls or find a snail, look closely!



Images by Dr. Dr. Quinn Passey



NPS

First Kemp's Ridley Nest of 2024

The first Kemp's Ridley nest was found the second weekend of April at South Padre Island. Although more than 95% of these turtles nest in Mexico, about 55 females come ashore each year in other locations.

If you see tracks leading to a disturbed area, please call 1-866-TURTLE-5 to report and keep your distance from the nest.

How the Monarch got its Spots



If you look closely at a monarch, you'll see a black band on the trailing edge of the wing containing a regularly spaced series of white spots. Does this alternating black and white pattern matter for migration?

Andy Davis and his colleagues set out to collect images of monarch wings at three locations along the migration, breeding, along the route, and overwintering in Mexico. Maybe monarchs with a larger black area on the wing migrate more successfully? This had been seen in other species and is related to heating the air above the wing and reducing drag. Not true!

Monarchs with a larger white area in the black band migrate south more successfully. While the reason is not clear yet, it may have to do with setting up micro eddies above the wing, reducing drag. Although the difference in areas was small (3%), it could make a large difference for an insect traveling more than a thousand miles and weighing only as much as a paperclip.

So, next time you see a monarch, pay special attention to the black band and white spots. And appreciate that this is the first time a scientist has correlated the pattern to migration success.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0286921>

Reflections on Outreach - Part 2

I love working with children and young people and volunteer at several of the Houston Arboretum & Nature Center (HANC, which is a chapter partner) Homeschool science courses. While not coded as outreach on VMS, I've talked to quite a few parents about the TMN program and they seem impressed and interested to know what we do. People who are homeschooling their children see a chance to expand their knowledge of earth sciences and ecology. There are plenty of actual outreach opportunities at HANC in the Nature Discovery Center which is open as a drop-in every day - lots of volunteer hours needed each week! It's full of exciting (and living) insects, fish, reptiles, and displays about so many aspects of the Arboretum itself and Texas nature. Think scat, fur, bones, microscopes. If you haven't yet been in - and many visitors think it is "only" for children - do go. I have spoken to many adults - with and without kids - while volunteering there who love to engage in personal discussion about the natural world or join me in internet and book research to find answers to the many questions that such wide-ranging displays throw up. Go visit, then go volunteer, is my suggestion!

Another passion of mine is birds, and I've managed to do some fun outreach activities with binoculars in hand. The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory (GCBO, also a chapter partner) has many wonderful avian activities that we can volunteer for. Probably their biggest need for numbers is during the Spring migration northwards. They run a birding festival 'Spring Fling' at their Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary every year - in 2024 it's April 6th to May 5th, 2024 from 9 am - 4 pm daily. That's a lot of volunteer shifts! I spent a wonderful day there in April last year close to the Gulf, talking to birders who came to spot the northward migrants. OMG - what we saw! I was learning as much as helping, as there were many more experienced birders visiting. American Redstart, Baltimore Oriole, Hooded Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, White-eyed Vireo, Indigo Bunting, and Painted Bunting just to name a few!

An opportunity that won't be available this year is Raptor Fest at the Audubon Raptor Center (currently undergoing renovation) but Mary Anne Morris, Houston Audubon's Education Director, will be bringing some of the amazing birds, I believe, to her Ornithology talk to the Spring Training Class on March 25th. Outreach is a two-way street and Audubon does lots of it!

I hope this gives a quick overview of the many and varied opportunities that I have had gaining volunteer service hours while doing outreach - and perhaps you will be enticed to join in. As always, many opportunities come your way in the regular Outreach emails from David Gwin or within some of the general volunteer emails from Richard Solberg.

Rose McFetridge
Certified Texas Master Naturalist, Gulf Coast Chapter
Class of Spring 2023

Chapter Field Trips - Brazos Bend State Park

The first field trips to Brazos Bend State Park were a success, as the attendees seemed to enjoy the walks. The weather played a bit of havoc with the plans, as originally two field trips were planned and they were meant to take place on the same trail on the same weekend, but that plan ended up changing.

Due to heavy rains the week before, on Saturday the Red Buckeye Trail was rather muddy and six hardy and enthusiastic participants proceeded with caution as we enjoyed the lush green environment. The red buckeyes were beautiful, even if this wasn't the best year for them. We saw blooming hawthorns, rusty blackhaw viburnums, and many gum bumelias - during the week before, a fantastic moth, a Red Tailed Spector Moth, was photographed at BBSP and it uses gum bumelia as a host plant.

There were patches of irises, some burning nettles, green dragons, Carolina satyr butterflies, and resurrection ferns, among the usual wonderful purple rockets and wispy meadow rues.

The Sunday field trip was postponed for a week due to a forecast of bad weather and due to closed trails. It was rescheduled for the following Sunday, but even then the Buckeyes Trail was still closed so we walked the Elm Lake Trail, totally different but equally as pretty and interesting. There were five of us and each person added to the fun. There were water birds, including coots, a white ibis, and black whistling ducks, and lots of alligators, mostly on the far bank of the lake. The week before there was a water moccasin sunning at the edge of the trail. Plant-wise, we saw Philadelphia Fleabanes, Herbertias, Gulf Vervain, Reticulate Seeded Spurge - a cute, small euphorbia -, a large leaved milkweed vine, lots of Spanish moss, and more gum bumelias. It seemed we finished just in time, as the wind picked up and the sky got dark.

Two additional things to mention, at this time of year on the way into the park, one is treated to a glorious view of a large group of blooming spider lilies. And on the way out a great way to end the visit is to stop and see the nest of a returning owl pair and their young, they are beautiful creatures we don't see often.

Katy Emde

Red Buckeye Trail



Celeste Mead

Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*), after which the trail is named. The flowers attract hummingbirds and bees. Squirrels consume the nuts. Young shoots and leaves are poisonous to humans.



Marianne Smith

More Plants from the Trails



Left – Reticulated Spurge (Katy Emde), Right – Iris sp. (Robert Killian)

Moth and Its Host Plant



Right – Red-tailed Specter Moth (Pam Smolen), Right – Gum bumelia (Melody Lytle, Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center)

Park Entrance/Exit



Robert Killian



Angela Ross