

July 2026



Naturalist Notes

Upcoming

Sat, Aug 1st and Sun, Aug 2nd – First Weekends on the Prairie. Indiangrass Preserve open 7 am to 1 pm.

Tue, Aug 4th – International Owl Awareness Day.

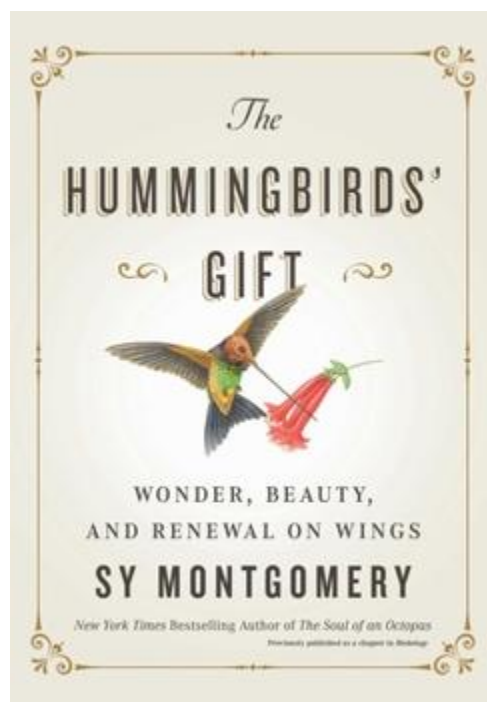
Thu, Aug 6th – Monthly Chapter Meeting at HANC, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm.

Sat, Aug 8th – Jones Bay Boat Ramp Cleanup, 9 am to 11 am. SPLASH.

Sat, Aug 15th – Purple Martin Watch Party, 7:45 pm, location TBD. Check Houston Audubon website for info.

Tue, Aug 19th – Swift Night Out, 7:45 pm, Whole Foods, 4004 Bellaire Blvd

Book Club September



Houston Audubon Bird Week Sep 19 – 26

Check Audubon's website for an updated list of events associated with Houston Bird Week.



Soil – pH

Definition of pH

pH is a measure of the acidity or alkalinity of soil. The higher the concentration of H^+ ions, the more acidic the soil and the lower the pH. Soils generally vary between a pH of 3 and 10, with more acidic or basic soils being rare. A pH of 7 is neutral

Sources of Acidity

Rain has a pH of around 5.6. Areas with higher rainfall tend to have more acidic soils. Plants also contribute to soil acidity through growth and root respiration. Growing plants take up nutrients from the soil. Many nutrients are positively charged. To maintain an overall neutral charge, plants release positively charged hydrogen ions. Respiration produces carbon dioxide, further acidifying the soil. Oxidative weathering of some minerals also produces acids.

Sources of Alkalinity

Weathering of some minerals, or the addition of these minerals to soil, contributes to alkalinity. Lack of water flowing through the soil, either through lack of rain or poor internal drainage, also leads to more alkaline soils.

Effect on Plants

In general, plant species are adapted to different soil pH. For example, Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) can grow in soils between 5.5 to 7.5 pH but prefers slightly acidic soil. Texas coneflower also prefers slightly acidic soils. In contrast, purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) prefers alkaline soils.

Aluminum toxicity is the most widespread problem in acidic soils. However, in the Houston area, high levels of aluminum are bound in aluminum silicates and oxides. These bound forms are not toxic to plants.

Organism of the Month

Purple Pleatleaf (*Alophia drummondii*)

Visiting Deer Park Prairie I came across a striking purple flower. Also known as the propeller flower, this member of the *Iridaceae* grows in sandy soils in open prairies and woodlands. Each plant produces a few flowers, while each flower only lasts a single day. It ranges from Arkansas to Oklahoma south to Mexico.



Book Review

The Fullness of Time – Marking the Day by Birdsong, Blooms, Shadows, and Stars

Cathy Haynes, 2026. Riverhead Books.

I came across this book during our summer vacation in Montana, demanding to be taken home. Or at least that's what it felt like. Over seven chapters, Cathy Haynes explores ways of telling time using such diverse tools as the dawn chorus, the opening and closing of flowers, working songs, the length of shadows, the position of the light across a landscape, the colors of the sunset, and the stars in the night sky. Her research ranges from ancient Egypt to recent generations living in the countryside.

Perhaps the reason this book spoke to me is because it invites us to pay attention. To pay attention to how the light changes predictably as the sun drops lower below the horizon. To pay attention to flowers opening and closing. To come up with our own 'day marks', places in our landscape that light touches. To appreciate how many ways of telling time are local to both place and season. Cathy Haynes invites readers along as she learns to pay attention to this aspect of the world around her and her life is much richer for it. Yours can be, too.

'Tis wealth enough of joy for me
In summer time to simply be.

- Paul Lawrence Dunbar
"In Summer Time"



ADA Trail Maintenance at the Arboretum



June 20 –

Today's work on the Houston Arboretum's ADA trials was a very sweaty affair. Fortunately, everyone survived. Thank you to all for their efforts today.

From L-R in the group pic: (first timers are in ALL CAPS)

Ridley Smith, Richard Solberg, ISAAC MENDOZA, Celeste Quintero, JASMINE RAMIREZ, Christopher Newhouse, JAZMIN PEREZ.

