

September 2026



Naturalist Notes

Upcoming

Sat, Sep 26th – Fourth Sat of the Month Phenology Walk, 9 am – 11 am, HANC, free.

Sat, Sep 26th – Bat Fest, 10 am – 2 pm, HANC.

Sat, Sep 26th – Wildscapes Workshop and Native Plant Sale, NPSOT – Houston, 9 am – 3 pm, Houston Zoo. Registration required.

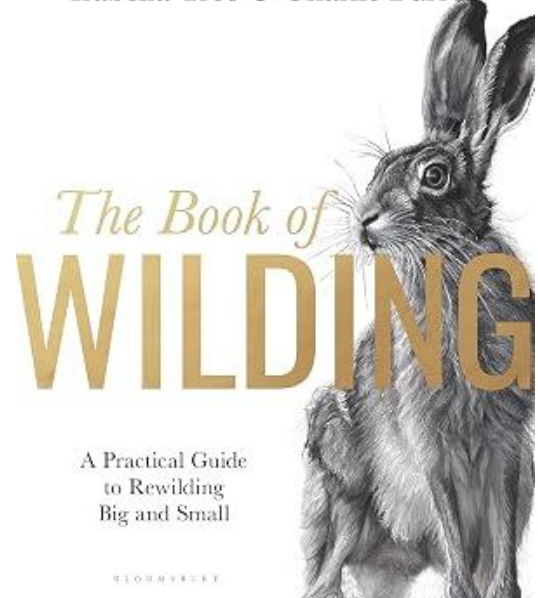
Thu, Oct 1st – Monthly Chapter Meeting, 6:30 pm, HANC.

Fri, Oct 2nd and Sat, Oct 3rd – Native Plant Sale, 9 am – 2 pm, HANC.

Sat, Oct 17th – Birds Houston Native Plant Sale, Edith L. Moore.

November Book Club Selection

Isabella Tree & Charlie Burrell



Houston Audubon Bird Week Sep 19 – 26

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



Soil – Soil Atmosphere

Either water or air can occupy the spaces between soil particles. Dry soil contains more gas. Diffusion moves gases from the soil to the atmosphere above it. Soil atmosphere has almost the same concentration of oxygen and nitrogen as the atmosphere above it. The concentration of carbon dioxide is more than 6 times higher in soil atmosphere, and the concentration of water vapor also tends to be higher. The composition of the soil atmosphere depends on the rate of decomposition of organic materials by microbes.



Briefs

Red Tide Bloom (Sep 14th)

The TPWD Kills and Spills Team is monitoring a red tide bloom in the Gulf. Water samples indicate moderate to high levels of red tide cells. Fish kills and impact on beachgoers has also been reported.

TPWD

New World Screwworm (Sep 23rd)

Cases of New World Screwworm appear to be declining. To date, only one case has been reported in Texas in September. No cases have been reported in wild and feral animals. Release of sterile flies is the most effective way to halt the spread of the parasite. While sterile flies are currently produced and dispersed in Panama and Mexico, an additional dispersal facility at Moore Air Base in Texas is operational.

TPWD & USDA

Drought Status (Sep 23rd)

Harris, Fort Bend, Brazoria, and Galveston counties are among the 218 Texas counties with outdoor burn bans. If you plan to visit a state park located in these counties, check the park's website for updated information on campfires and cooking.

Texas A&M Forest Service

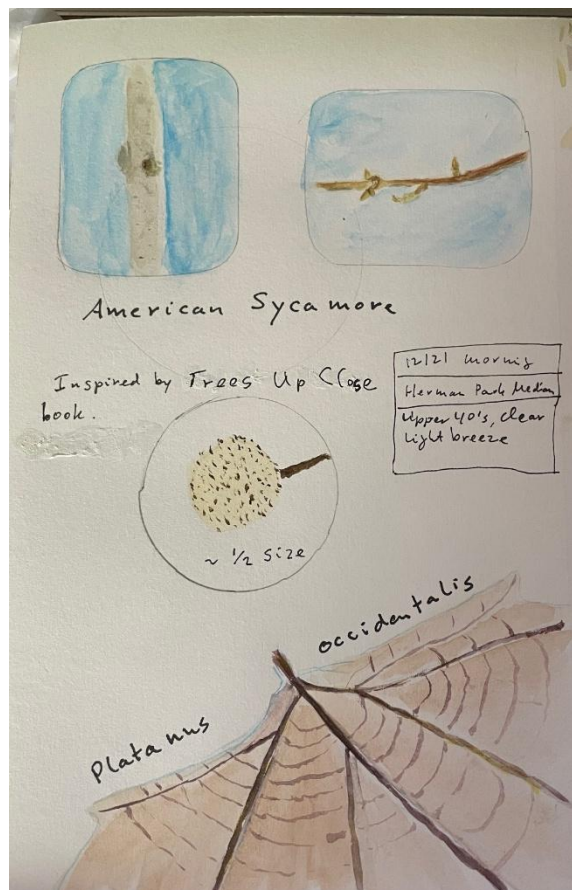
Organism of the Month

American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)

The white trunks and upper branches of Sycamore trees are a familiar sight in Houston. American Sycamore prefers moist sandy loam or silty clay soil and grows wild in floodplains and bottomlands. It grows to a trunk diameter larger than other native hardwoods, with the current champion tree about 11 feet in diameter.

Sycamore bark is rigid and brittle. As the tree grows, the bark cannot expand. Instead, it peels off in irregular patches, leaving the white inner bark, often with a mottled appearance. Ecologists suggest several different possible advantages for peeling bark – it may rid the tree of dirt, moss or insects that accumulated, the trunk may absorb sunlight and help in photosynthesis, the white trunk makes it easier for predators to spot herbivores.

I've included a journal page from a few years ago where I spent time with one of the young sycamore trees just North of Palmer Episcopal Church in the median between Main and Fannin streets. Both some leaves and fruit still clung to the branches.





Pictured is September's crew that worked on the ADA trials at the Houston Arboretum and Nature Center.

From L-R: Guarav Sharma, Jasmine Ramirez, Frankie Ortega, Jazmin Perez, Richard Solberg, Jay Dryden and Isaac Mendoza.

I want to give a special shout out to Guarav Sharma. He's in the current class and this day he put in his very first TXMN volunteer hours. Welcome, Guarav, to our group!

Our photographer was Trevor Rubenstahl, arboretum conservation team member.

Thanks to everyone for a great effort.

Richard Solberg