Hardy Headlines: Natural Areas and Creekways

Ethnobotany

Many native plants were used for food, medicine, tools, weapons, dyes and building materials by early Texans. Oak gall ink, cochineal red dye, persimmon jelly, mesquite flour, stool fiber baskets, toothache tree gum numbing, and Ashe juniper posts are some examples.

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Agarita

The Agarita has trifoliate leaves, bright red berries and its flowers have a honey vanilla smell. It serves as shelter with it's sharp points, food and sensory wonder.

Insects

Insects have six legs, three body parts, one pair of antennae and most have wings. In general, insects are beneficial. You are most likely to see insects early morning or late afternoon. Even when you can't see insects, you can see evidence of their presence in holes, spots, trails and galls on plants. Other arthropods, like spiders can also be seen in the park. Spiders have 2 body parts with the head and thorax combined in a cephalothorax, eight legs and no antennae.

Butterflies

Butterflies are insects of the order "Lepidoptera." They have compound eyes, antennae, three main body parts (head, thorax and abdomen), six pairs of legs, and a hard, chitinous exoskeleton. Their two pairs of wings are covered, with often beautifully colored scales. They take in fluids with a tube-like proboscis.

Texas butterflies are organized in families—Swallowtails, Whites and Sulphurs, Gossamer-wing, Metal-marks, Brush-footed, and Skippers.

Butterflies undergo complete metamorphosis from egg to caterpillar or larva, pupa or chrysalis, and adult.

Butterflies are usually brightly colored, flying by day with clubbed antennae while moths are generally dull, nocturnal and have feathered or thready.

The Butterfly Meadow in Phil Hardberger Park provides all the needs for the insect—sun and flowers and nearby trees for shade and shelter.

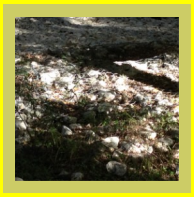
Poetry

Nature has always inspired poets. Poet Mobi Warren begins with the breath, taking time, walking slowly, feeling each step. Being there and stopping to look and look some more. Here is one of her poems:

Into the dayflowers
a white-winged dove flutters,
hungry for black seeds,
shards of crushed snail shell.
When she ascends to branch,
she is a flash of crescent moons.

Geology

Geology is one factor that shaped Phil Hardberger Park. The plants you see tell the story of the soil beneath, and the soil of the underlying geology. The kinds of rocks are a clue to why the creeks are frequently dry and why rain is either filtered or runs off. Geology explains our thin, alkaline soils and is a factor in understanding the plants and animals that flourish here. On the Geology Trail, the "borrow pit" and Salado Creek Overlook give you a view into the more easily observed geology, but much of the rock structure is hidden under soil and vegetation. Phil Hardberger Park lies over thick layers of limestone. During the Cretaceous, this area was under shallow seas. The seas advanced and retreated with changes in sea levels and as continental masses rose and fell.



You can see loose materials deposited by flowing water within the last two million years. The approximately 94 million year old limestone of Phil Hardberger Park is part of the Buda Formation, found near Buda, Texas. old. The Buda is younger than the Edwards and lies above it. You can see Buda rock by the Salado Creek Overlook.

Riparian

Riparian areas are the bands of vegetation in the floodplains of rivers and seasonal creeks. These areas provide sources of water for wildlife and people, abundant food for animals, serve as "highways" for wildlife, and offer "natural services" to create a healthy ecosystem. Plants filter and purify water, stabilizing the soil with their roots, decreasing erosion and sedimentation. Salado Creek runs through Phil Hardberger Park creating a healthy riparian area. While almost always dry, its plants sponge up water during heavy storms. While floods are a problem for property owners, healthy riparian areas benefit from a flood every few years.

Photography

Gary Rogers gives this basic advice to photography beginners:

Take the shot—even if it's not perfect, the opportunity will not come again.

Hold the camera steady—two hands, elbows close to the body.

Focus on your subject—consider turning off autofocus which may 'choose" what the focus will be.

Compose the shot—divide the view in thirds and consider using the top or bottom third to get more visual interest.

Be aware of light—early and late will highlight detail while midday light flattens the image.

Phil Hardberger Park Conservancy

Alamo Area Master Naturalists

Educate, renew, recreate

The materials in Hardy Headlines are based in the AAMN Natural Areas and Creekways Guide.

http://alamomasternaturalist.org/NALC.html

Learning Landscape

Phil hardberger Park was conceived as a leaning landscape.

We can read the landscape on several levels—look in the distance at the topography, patterns of sun and shade, weather. Look hereby at the variety of plants and passing wildlife. And then get in close and examine a plant in detail. And wonder—ask what do I know about this living thing, what do I want to know, how can I learn and confirm my guesses?

Grasses

Phil Hardberger Park with its Savanna Restoration Project is a treasure chest of grass. There are the tall grass prairie grasses—Indiangrass, Little bluestem, Big bluestem and Switchgrass, mid-height grasses such as Eastern gamagrass and Purpletop, and sort grasses such as Hall's panicum, In addition there are invasive grasses—King Ranch, Australian, Kleberg, and Angleton bluestems.

Grasses provide food and cover for a diversity of wildlife and offer natural services stabilizing the soil and minimizing run-off.