Habitat Certification Programs

What Are We Looking For?

By Mark Klym
Texas Wildscapes Coordinator
We Look For

- Landscapes that provide all the habitat basics year round with a majority of native plants
Two Basic Programs

- Texas Wildscapes
  - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program
  - National Wildlife Federation
Combined To Form

• Best of Texas Backyard Habitats
  – One stop shopping
  – More challenge for Texas landowners
  – Enhance commitment to habitat stewardship
Both Applications

• Start with the food component
  – what is provided as tall trees, small trees, shrubs and bushes, annuals and perennials
• Best of Texas adds the challenge of what is the food provided and when is it available
• Also adds the grasses
Also Ask About Available Feeders

• Not a necessary component unless food is unavailable at some point during the year.
Move Next To Water Features

• Is water available year round and how is it provided

– Texas Wildscapes it can be by living on a permanent water source
– Best of Texas Backyard Habitats requires that the water be **provided** by the landowner
Shelter Provisions

• What shelter is available for wildlife to flee to should danger present
  – Ask generally is it available and, if thicket is chosen what does the thicket consist of
    • This is an area where exotic invasives will often be listed
Best of Texas Adds

• How are you protecting against exotic predatory species
  – Cats, House Sparrow, European Starling, etc.
  – This question must be answered to meet the standards
Nesting Cover Is A Valuable Asset to Wildlife Habitat

- Many point back to the first questions, but we are looking for that extra touch
  - Tall trees, short trees, shrubs, cavity trees, wildlife pools, etc.
  - Also look for nestboxes and their placement

Photo by John Davis
Butterflies Present a Unique Challenge Here

- What host plants do you have for butterflies
  - Where would I find caterpillars in your garden
  - Often get nectar plants listed instead
We Give You An Opportunity To Highlight Your Habitat Stewardship

• What have YOU done to encourage wildlife on your property?
  – Installed nest boxes
  – Preserved snags
  – Built a brush pile
  – Restored native plants
  – Installed host plants
  – Etc.
Best of Texas Backyard Habitats

• Asks also that you be involved in at least six of thirteen common conservation stewardship practices.
  – Xeriscaping and removing invasive exotics are essentially given if you meet the other standards.
Has It Worked?

• We ask that you give a brief list of some of the wildlife you have seen on your property
Supporting Materials

• A few photos of the habitat
• A sketch of the property
• Any associated documents
What Happens Next?

• May take a month or so, depending on the season.
  – Your application is reviewed by our staff or volunteers to ensure it meets the standards
  – A letter of congratulations, certificate and news release form are sent to you
  – You get the opportunity to purchase a garden sign.
Volunteers or Biologist Will Only Visit The Property

- If you provide permission
- If we have had issues with habitats in that area in the recent past.
Show Your Support for Wildlife!

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