

CITY NATURE HIKE COMMITTEE PAUSE FOR A LITTLE PHOTO
OP WHILE AT CLEAR CREEK NATURAL HERITAGE CENTER



L to R: Sherrill Campbell, Sharon Barr, Marian Kester, Louise Wyss, CJ Solberg, Dorothy Thetford, Dave Ford, Dave Rowley.

The committee “hiked” a girl scout group from Red Oak, TX, Saturday, September 7, 2013.

Photo and information courtesy D. Thetford



Submitted by Jeanne Erickson

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Michael Warriner, TPWD Invertebrate Biologist, needs help – lots of it. Thing is, helping him out is not only fun, but easy to do and entertaining to boot. And you don't even have to venture past your own backyard to give him a hand. In the process of observing native bees, you will also become, as I have, more aware of all the variety of insects that visit flowers – not just the multitude of pollinators, but also the other insects such as spiders, beetles and mantises that lie in wait among the blooms to capture their next meal. It has truly been an eye-opening experience.

Bees have been in the news a lot lately – recently they were even featured as the cover story in Time magazine. Most of the focus has been on the non-native European honeybee due to its value to agriculture, but no less important to the process of plant pollination are our native pollinators – bees, flies, beetles, wasps, butterflies and moths – who are under significant stress due to habitat loss and degradation, introduced pests and diseases and pesticide use. According to the Xerxes Society “bees are the preeminent pollinators in North America. They are a keystone species group; the survival of a large number of other species depends on them. Pollinators are also indicator species, meaning that the viability and health of pollinator populations provide a snapshot of the health of the ecosystem” (Attracting Native Pollinators, 2011, p.11).

Since lack of information hampers research funding and conservation action measures, this is where we can all help Michael. “Despite their critical roles in agriculture and natural ecosystems, bumblebees have gone relatively unstudied in Texas. The last published review of species in the state was in 1912, a century ago. There is a real need to evaluate the status to assess how their populations are faring and to determine whether conservation actions are needed. A first step in this process is simply recording where species are today. The website texasbumblebees.com enlists citizen “bumblewatchers” to aid in evaluating the state’s bumblebee fauna. Contributing to this process can be as simple as casually snapping images of bumblebees on flowers or recording the date and location” (texasbumblebees.com website).

Even if you cannot directly participate in the **Bumblebee Watch** program, there are important things you can do (ref. www.nrcs.usda.gov):

- Use pollinator friendly native plants for spring, summer and fall bloom with different flower colors, shapes and sizes
- Reduce or eliminate pesticide use in your landscape
- Accept some damage on plants meant to provide habitat for butterfly and moth larvae
- Provide clean water in a shallow bowl or birdbath
- Leave dead tree trunks for wood nesting bees and beetles
- Support land conservation in your community

If you are attending the Annual Statewide Meeting this October in New Braunfels, Michael is scheduled to present an Advanced Training session – “Native Bee Diversity & Identification” - on Sunday October 27 from 9-11 AM. It is guaranteed to be a lively and interesting presentation.

To learn more about bumblebees and native pollinators you may want to start here:

- Michael D. Warriner’s web site – <http://texasbumblebees.com/> – information on how to participate in the program and identify bumblebees
- Xerxes Society - www.xerxes.org – an incredible resource on all native pollinators
- Carole Brown is a conservation biologist in Pennsylvania, and the editor of this site, and she has put together this absolutely phenomenal resource list for pollinators. There is not one lame link here! <http://www.beautifulwildlifegarden.com/guide-to-attracting-native-bees.html>

Courtesy D. Thetford

"How many moons can you see in one evening?"



Dorothy Thetford's native wildflower plant, '**Moonflower**' (*Datura wrightii*), provided 80 blooms during the night of August 26, 2013.

Those flowers expired by 9:30 the following morning, and the plant provided 70 fresh blooms during the night of August 27. The number of blooms diminished each following evening. Each morning the flowers were buzzing with honey bees, bumble bees, night hawk moths, and multiple pollinators. Nature at its best!

Who's tapping at my door?

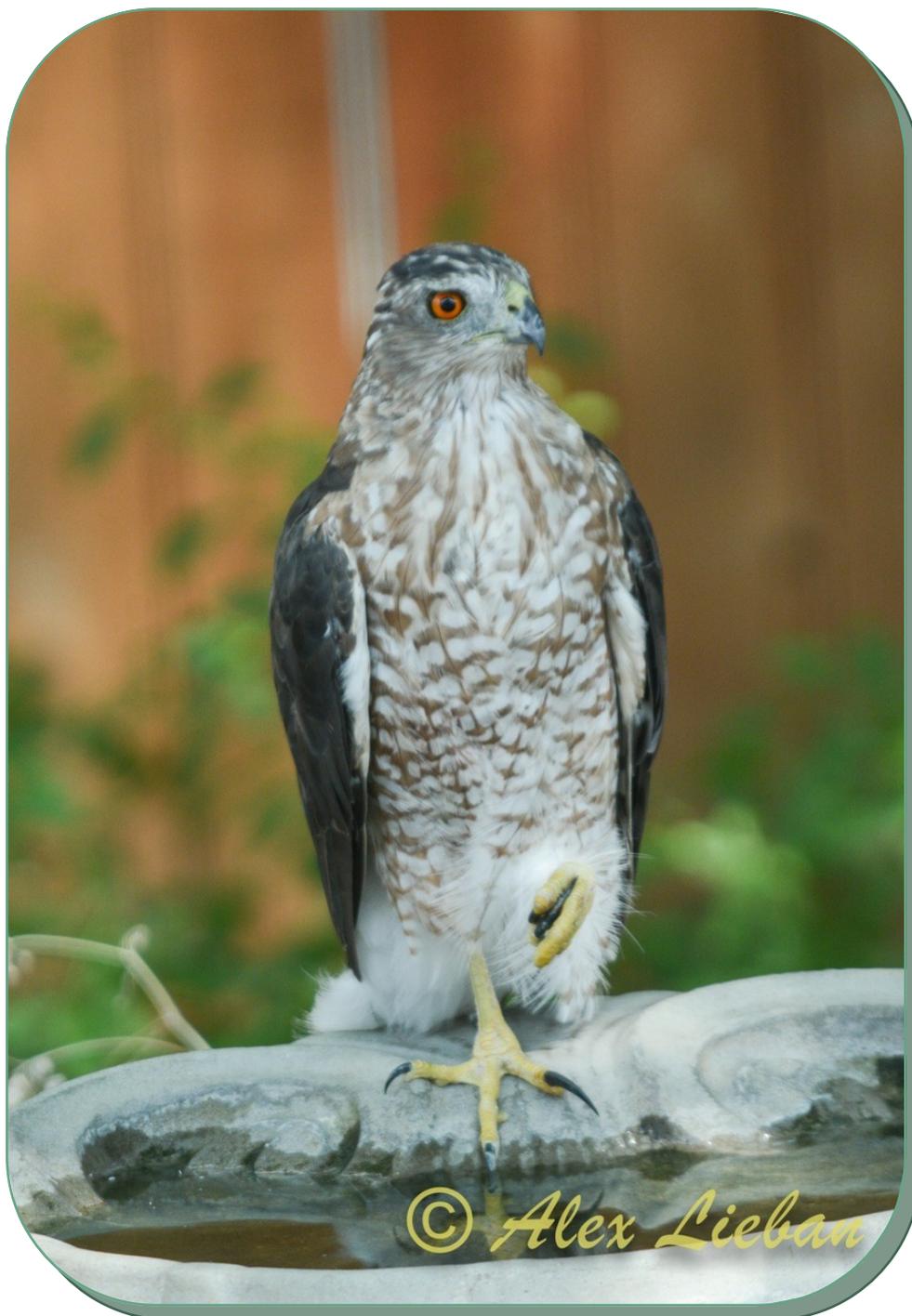
From Alex Lieban

"'Tis some visiter,"
I muttered,
"tapping at my
chamber door."

(E.A. Poe)

~

And along came
Clyde.



We have a daily visitor to one of our backyard birdbaths. The cooper's hawk (a male I believe) has remained at his cool perch for as much as two hours at a stretch the last few days.

I figured if he is going to be a member of the family I would name him. He will be called **Clyde**.

All photos courtesy D. Thetford

NATIVE PLANTS OF TEXAS for BLUEBIRDS

Dorothy Brown Thetford

If you were fortunate enough to attend the recent Texas Bluebird Society (TBS) Symposium in August, you should have walked away with valuable information that will enable you to become better bluebird 'parents', regardless if you were a naturalist, a birder, or native plant enthusiast. Yes, we continue to strive to outfox the predators, but there were also suggestions for providing the right kinds of plants to your landscape, i.e., the plants that will produce an all-you-can-eat buffet for your 'children'? Here is a more detailed recap of one of the native plants suggested.



*Dorothy Thetford,
left, with Jan LaPine
at TBS meeting*

What does the word 'native' have to do with the recommended plants? What is native, you ask? The answer may vary a bit, but a simple definition is that native plants are the plants that were here in the United States before the Europeans arrived with plant samples from their home country. [Their plants can be identified as 'introduced', even though the nursery trade has certainly monopolized that category during the last fifty years.] Native plants have miraculously survived here for years and years, have naturally adapted to vary from soil to soil, climate to climate, elevation to elevation, temperature to temperature, moisture to drought. When we mention a plant as being native to 'this area', we mean that it should grow naturally without intervention by mankind. It has settled into the environment of its own accord and will survive regardless of most outside elements.

Why is this information of any value to us? Allowing native plants to grow in their natural environment and/or planting 'known' natives in their proper environmental elements have several benefits. Firstly, the plants will need less of your attention, no pesticides, and most importantly, less water from our drying aquifers. Win! Win! Win! Secondly, when we learn to identify, preserve, protect, and plant native plants, we become stewards of the earth, not only for our own benefits but for the survival of the animal kingdom. Remember, native wildlife is well aware of the native plants on which they've survived for hundreds of years. Think before you destroy a plant for your own gratification.

I'm sure you're aware of the habitat needs to protect our wildlife, i.e., water, shelter, corridors for travel, and food, so here's where we can step in. If our bluebirds require certain foods to sustain their small bodies, and if parenting bluebirds need certain foods to feed their even smaller young babies, wouldn't it behoove us to provide as much food as possible for their survival?

How can we begin? How about growing your own bluebird delicatessen. Plant the native plants that are indigenous to your specific area, and the indigenous birds of your area will respond. Case in point, many native trees, shrubs, vines and flowers were recommended at the symposium as food sources for many of our native birds, and each is worthy of your further research. I've chosen a certain native vine for this discussion because of Keith Kridler's (co-founder of TBS) comment about caterpillars/worms being a staple food for bluebirds, plus, this vine has proven very beneficial from my personal experience. Passionflower vine. I always recommend this vine to the Denton ISD Teacher-Training-Summer-Workshops for luring butterflies to their school gardens; however, this article is directed toward you to not only attract the butterflies, but with hopes that the butterflies will lay eggs on your foliage, the eggs will hatch into caterpillars, and you'll have food for your bluebirds. [Please do not spray plant with pesticides, even though leaves will be riddled with holes.]