

# Good Water Ripples

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T E X A S



## UPCOMING EVENTS

10/3/18	NPAT
10/11/18	NPSOT
10/18/18	Travis Audubon
10/22/18	Austin Butterfly Forum
11/7/18	NPAT
11/8/18	NPSOT
11/12/18	WAG
11/15/18	Travis Audubon
11/26/18	Austin Butterfly Forum

Check the website for additional events including volunteer and training opportunities. The events are too numerous to post here.

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## Garey Park Wildlife Viewing Area

By Mary Ann Melton Photos by Jim Hailey



Jim Hailey has been the Project Leader for the Good Water Chapter's volunteer work at Garey Park. He has been the leader in the building of a new Wildlife Viewing area. Construction began in October for the blind at the park. The concrete pilings were poured the first week. Good Water

Master Naturalists constructed the benches and are working on the framing.

The blind should be finished in the next couple of weeks. Plans are for a water feature to attract wildlife and feeding stations.

During the winter months, entrance to Garey Park is free on Tuesdays.



"Fall has always been my favorite season. The time when everything bursts with its last beauty, as if nature had been saving up all year for the grand finale." - Lauren Destefano

## Humped Bladderwort, *Utricularia gibba* by Mike Farley



Recently I came across a plant that was new to my eyes. It was growing out of a floating mass of green algae in Dry Berry Creek. This was on the Southeastern edge of Berry Springs Park and Preserve south of CR152. It had beautiful yellow blooms with singular bare stems about 6 cm tall and was fairly widespread on all of the algae. I took a few images of the plant from the creek bank since I did not have any wading boots with me. These images would suffice for me to get an ID of the plant on iNaturalist. iNat suggested the correct species, but I left it at “Bladderworts”, so that someone more knowledgeable would confirm the species. It did not take long before an ID was given, and since it has had additional confirmations. I also found this it on the North San Gabriel River.

After initial reading about the species which was common to central Texas, it became clear that this was a carnivorous plant, which is not all that common to most folks, including myself. I had documented some Pitcher plants up in Anderson County at Gus Engeling Wildlife Management Area last year. This was Williamson County! While this was the first observation in Williamson County, there have been observations in Travis, Bastrop, and Burnett Counties.

My fascination with this species continued with each article I read, with very interesting science discoveries about this species. It’s DNA has been sequenced to reveal only 80 million base pairs, which is low comparatively. However it’s “junk DNA”, the unused genes in all living things, is at 3%! Humans and many plants are at 97%. This plant has replicated its sequence for 3 generations over 10 – 20 million years according to science. Along the way it has figured out how to throw out the useless DNA in favor of more useful genes that convert nutrients and response to sunlight. (continued)

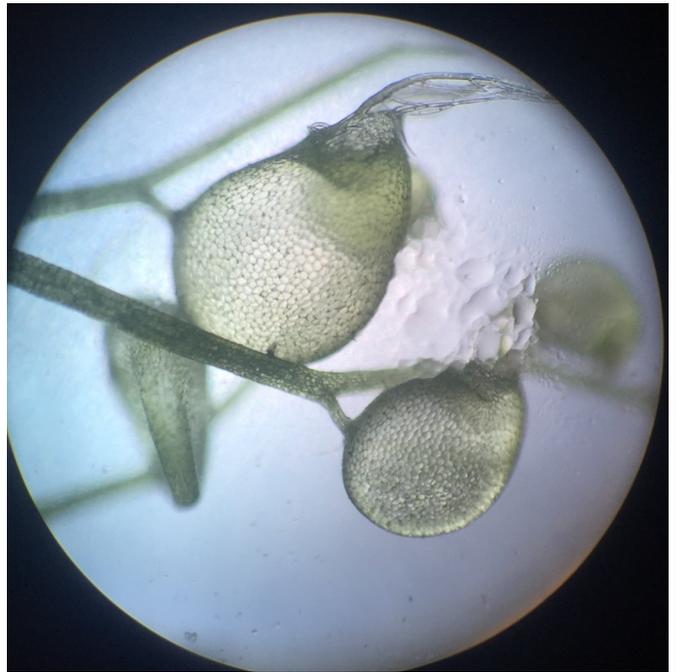
## Humped Bladderwort Continued

Underwater sacs or traps 1 to 3mm in size detect prey with filament hairs and trigger the doors creating a vacuum under a millisecond. Micro sized crustaceans or water fleas are consumed. Papain, an enzyme found in meat tenderizer, is used to break down the food.

A nutrient rich habitat is required for its survival and it has done that well. It is of least concern status as well as being recognized as a National wetland indicator status plant. It blooms from May through August.

**Albert, Victor** Evolutionary plant biologist State University of New York at Buffalo

**Hsu, Charlotte** Carnivorous Plant's prized genetic treasures, unveiled May 15, 2017 State University of New York at Buffalo



**Feltman, Rachel** The Mysterious Genes of Carnivorous Bladderwort reveal themselves Feb. 23, 2015

## United Way Day of Caring 2018 @ Berry Springs Park & Preserve

by Susan Blackledge



After fearing the worst from Mother Nature and the weather forecast, the Day of Caring weather couldn't have been any better. United Way of Williamson County had service projects going on throughout the County. At Berry Springs, a total of 31 folks came out to help their community by doing various projects in the park. 120 pecan trees were weeded, composted and mulched. The playground had 16 cubic yards (a lot) of Kiddie Mulch added to the playing surface. Pecan tree branches heavy with pecans were trimmed. FYI, this is going to be a great year for pecans! They should be dropping around the end of October. It's first come first served with pecans and the squirrels (pecan experts) are regular campers at the park and pretty darn quick.

After a recent storm and over 3" of rain several dump truck loads of limbs were removed. Master Naturalists participating were John Clifford, Craig Halliday, Keri Dunn, Jim Abreu, Lynn Hester, Rana Sanders, and Susan Blackledge.

**Save the Date for United Way Day of Service to be held on Monday, Jan.21<sup>st</sup> Martin Luther King Holiday. We will be working on the Nature Trail.**

# River Ranch County Park Workday by David Armstrong & Mary Ann Melton



## **Good Water Master Naturalists**

Patrick McElhinney  
Shannon Spann  
Holly Stave  
Scott Quigley  
Mike Rodgers

Mike Brasel  
Dave Armstrong  
**RRCP Staff**  
Jay Gomez  
Cody Smith

Our project for the September Workday was to clear Ashe Juniper and unwanted brush. We cleared the gate at 8:00 am. The morning was cool, the morale high, and the RRCP staff was ready and well prepared. We gathered around for the obligatory group photograph and instructions from Mr. Gomez. We deployed our forces, some to work on brush on the north side of the road and others to two live oak trees on the south side of the road. For the next three hours, we were as busy as ants, cutting, swamping, and clearing years of combustible brush, especially Ashe Juniper from under two live oak trees. The brush and cedar under the trees constitute a threat to the live oaks which are otherwise well adapted to survive natural fires.

We cleared out two of the live oaks before the heat and humidity made continuing the project unhealthy and unsafe. Patrick McElhinney and Mike Rodgers faithfully work at the park on Wednesdays and can continue the project. Other naturalists are welcome and encouraged to join them.

The Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting has three field trips planned to River Ranch. One will be hikes on several routes through the park. Another will be a seed gathering expedition. The seeds will be used to help restore the prairie areas with native grasses and herbs. The third field trip will be a guided walk about the Edwards Plateau Ecosystem by Dr. Barron Rector from Texas A&M University.

## Destinations: Bracken Cave by April Rohlich

Bracken Cave opens availability for 2019 tours in the month of April and continues through the end of September. I went May 24, 2017 and kept these notes.

It was a joyful privilege to experience these bats' emergence in an intimate setting. Bracken Cave is owned and managed by Bat Conservation International (BCI.) I signed up for an evening at [Membersnight@batcon.org](mailto:Membersnight@batcon.org). They were available June 1 through September 30; 4 with camping in a fenced, cleared area. There were several nights already sold out. One can sign up as a member for a \$30 – \$60 donation. Members may bring 3-5 guests who must each sign a waiver. I suggest that it



was worth the effort of committing ahead of time.

The 7 miles drive from IH35 to the welcome area was as expected. Then, the 2 miles of dirt road was heartwarming. I am so glad the 1,500 acres area is preserved by BCI and The Nature Conservancy. There was a short presentation, then Q&A from mostly the kids. As soon as we saw bats emerging, we went quiet. That was the most magical part for me hearing the fluttering sounds and nothing else.

At some point, we each had cameras or binoculars covering our faces, but tried to just “be there.” Two Cooper’s Hawks swooped in to dine but were scared further away by the growing noise we were begin-

ning to make discussing our fascination. A Western Coachwhip showed up at the mouth of the cave for dinner also. I saw a Summer Tanager atop a dead branch as I was leaving about two hours after the 10 million or so pregnant bats began coming out for the night.

Many of the 55 attendees had never seen any bat. I was so accustomed to seeing Congress Bridge and McNeil Bridge bats, but still very captivated by this natural landscape. The others were in complete awe. A couple from China were there on a stop while traveling all around the U.S. and Canada. They loved it.

It appeared that each BCI member may attend once per year. Perhaps more as a guest, but I think they want to share with as many people as possible. I’ll go again!



## Owls, Hope and Zen by Holly Stave

To me, owls are like unicorns and armadillos – magical, mysterious and rarely seen. Even so, I placed an owl house in my backyard’s ancient oak. One can hope. Several weeks later my hope waning, I startled my household with garbled shrieks of “Owl, owl”. An Eastern Screech Owl had moved in! Homer was his name and we intently observed each other gardening, napping, sunning ...living . There is something very zen about the way an owl watches the world with stillness and wide-open eyes.



Homer



Mrs. Homer

Homer advertised his homeownership with calls and hoots and soon attracted a Mrs.

Homer. We took to sitting on our porch at dusk for owl observation. We heard thumps, and screeps emanating from the owl house and thanks to a covert photo mission we saw two bald gray babies deep in the nest.

One magical evening, with Mrs. Homer watching from our outdoor ceiling fan, the first owling appeared. We called him Homerling. With his fierce attitude and yellow eyed glare, he quickly discovered his wings. With Homer and Mrs.



Homerling

Homer’s guidance and encouragement Homerling jumped into the sky and flew off to live his life. Sigh.



Frodo

The second owling surprised me, perching on a chair back on toothpick legs, with piercing fiery green eyes set atop a ball of grey fuzz. I hadn’t even seen him; owls and owlings can be surprisingly still. We called him Frodo. He spent several days under my rosebushes and patio furniture, bravely exploring this new world under the gaze of both his family and mine. Days after Homerling’s departure, Frodo hopped up on the fence and was gone, along with Mr. and Mrs. Homer. Sigh. They will be missed.

They did leave us a beheaded lizard as a lovely parting gift. During our brief acquaintance with the Homers we learned much about Zen, bravery, perseverance, and letting go. I so hope they will come back to our owl house next year. Anyone know where I can get a unicorn or armadillo house? One can hope!

Purchase owl houses at [www.facebook.com/ScreechOwlMan/](http://www.facebook.com/ScreechOwlMan/)

# Round Rock Family Campout at Old Settler's Park

By Mary Ann Melton Photos by Mike Farley

With the threat of severe weather looming, 1,180 folks gathered at Old Settler's Park for a campout. The severe weather held off until after the Master Naturalist activity time after dinner. Stations included Aquatic Invertebrates, Butterfly Life Cycle Activity, Edible Bird's Nests, Leaf Litter Observation and a lighted Night Insect Observation Station.

After the storms came through, only eight families stayed overnight. But all the participants seemed to have a wonderful experience in spite of the incoming bad weather.



# Williamson County Pollinator Garden Workday

By Elizabeth Sartain



It was a humid Saturday morning on October 6<sup>th</sup> when approximately 15 Texas Master Naturalists and NPSOT members came together to tend to the Pollinator Garden at the Hutto Landfill. The garden is included on a field session tour of local pollinator gardens during the upcoming Annual Meeting.

The recent rains made it easier to pull weeds which included bindweed, King's Ranch Bluestem, and



several Euphorbia species. Goldenrod, maximilian sunflower, salvias, rock rose, and gregg's mistflower were in bloom and a few queen and yellow butterflies were spotted during the work day.

With so much blooming, visitors to the garden are sure to enjoy the plants and pollinators and learn about the garden during the field ses-

sion. Thank you to everyone who has helped make the garden a success.

For information about the Good Water Chapter

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