

Good Water Ripples

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Lori Franz, Editor • Holly Zeiner, Layout/Design



Gray Fox – When Nature Lives Among Us

By Mary Ann Melton

Many folks in Old Town Hutto are enjoying the visits of a resident gray fox. For one family, the fox visits their yard in the evening, coming in to eat the ripe mulberries. For another family, the fox comes for the cat food on the porch. I would be willing to bet there are gray foxes in Taylor as well. Foxes adapt well to urban environments.

Gray foxes are smaller than red foxes. Their fur is a mix of white, red, black, and gray. The top of the head, the back and sides are gray. The belly, cheeks, legs, and sides of the face are reddish brown. The cheeks, muzzle, and throat are white. The tail is long and bushy with a black stripe on top, and makes up one-third of their body length. Pupils are oval shaped with a thin black stripe from the outside corner of the eye to the side of the head. Fox ears and muzzle are pointed. Their long, hooked claws stay out all the time. Claws are used for digging dens, getting underground food sources, and climbing trees. Gray foxes are the only foxes that climb trees.

Red foxes are larger, have slit shaped eyes, larger feet, longer legs, and a leaner body. Dens can be rocky crevices, hol-

low logs, trees or caves. They have scent glands used to mark territory and to attract mates. Gray foxes are believed to be the oldest of all the fox species in the world. Gray foxes love to swim. They sometimes drive their prey into the water for an easier catch.



While gray foxes prefer deciduous forests with brush woodland areas, they also thrive where woodlands and farmlands meet. In Hutto, the gray fox seems to live right on the edge of town where

the tree line meets the farm fields. They are primarily nocturnal but are also spotted during the day.

Their diet is quite variable. For protein, they eat small mammals such as mice, voles, and eastern cottontail rabbits as well as birds and insects. They are omnivorous also eating corn, apples, nuts, berries, and grass. During late summer and fall, grasshoppers

and crickets are important food sources.

Gray foxes are solitary animals that only socialize during mating season between January and April. They are generally monogamous. The pups are born about 53 days later. Litters vary from one to seven pups with an average of three and a half. Newborns are usually dark brown. Both parents care for the young. The pups start solid foods around three weeks old. Mothers wean them at three months. The fathers teach them to pounce and stalk and the pups practice with each other during playtime. Parents teach the pups to hunt at four months. The pups leave their parents in the fall. Lifespan is 6-8 years with the oldest recorded wild gray fox living to 10. The oldest captive gray fox lived to 12 years old.



Game Camera Photo by Mike Farley

Gray foxes are native to North America and are found in most of the Southern United States all the way south to Central America and in

the eastern United States as far north as southern Canada. 🐾

2021 United Way Day of Service

By Susan Blackledge

28 volunteers attended Berry Springs United Way Day of Service on MLK Holiday. Service projects included:

- Replacing wooden boards at the Historical Compound.
- Spreading mulch on three trail sections.
- Adding mulch to the playground.
- Removing algae at the spring

deck area.

- Removing litter at the Nature Trail area and park grounds.
- Picking up sticks for Grounds Maintenance.

As seen below, everyone practiced social distancing even when taking photos and cleaning the pond.

The day was a great success, thanks to all who participated. 🌱



Member Milestones

Volunteer Name	250 Hours	500 Hours	Class
Cochran, Jack	5/31/2020	9/30/2020	2020 (Spring)
Hickman, Susan	4/9/2019	10/11/2020	2017 (Spring)
Wieland, Jim	11/15/2020		2019 (Fall)

2020 GWTMN Board

Officers

President - Nancy Phillips
 Vice President - Mary Gail Hamilton
 Treasurer - Bob Waring
 Secretary - Sandra Spurlock

Directors

Past President - Wayne Rhoden
 State Representative - Charles Grimes
 Membership - Randy Spurlock
 New Class - Wayne Rhoden
 Vol. Services Projects - Susan Hickman
 Adv. Training - August Wusterhausen
 Outreach and Publicity - Erin Buhl
 Host - Betty Jo Phillips
 Communications - Mary Ann Melton
 Youth Development - Mary Ann Melton
 At Large Director 1 - Jim Hailey
 At Large Director 2 - Open
 New Class Rep. Fall - Joel Chamberlain
 New Class Rep. Spring - Erin Buhl

Project Chairs

Angler Education - Jim Nelson
 Balcones Canyonland - Maggie Bond
 Berry Springs P&P - Susan Blackledge
 Blackland Heritage Park -
 Mary Ann Melton
 Blue Bird Count/Nest - Christie Gardner
 Garey Park - Jim Hailey, Bob Waring,
 Deb Hailey, Patricia Lopacki
 Gault Site Wildlife Survey- Bob Waring
 Good Water Book Club - A. J. Sencheck
 Good Water Library - Judy Grimes
 Good Water Stream Team Monitoring -
 Randy Spurlock
 Habitat Dev. SGU Church -
 Billye Adams
 McNeil Bridge Bats - Christie Gardner
 Odonata Research - Mike Farley
 Pollinator Garden - Elizabeth Sartain
 River Ranch County Park -
 David Armstrong
 Nature Trackers - Mike Farley

Cuckoo for You!

By Mike Farley

Have you ever seen a Cuckoo wasp land nearby and by the time you get in position to photograph it, it is gone, or moving so quickly that it is useless to try? You do not soon forget the beauty that you saw though.

As with any continued effort, you get better as time goes by. I recently managed to capture some acceptable images of *Chrysis angolensis*, a common introduced species of Cuckoo wasp for our area. Of course, I was extremely pleased with this, however the rest of the story is what is so amazing.

Behaviors are part of the beauty of nature and coming to understand them a little at a time, is what makes being a naturalist so endearing.

Cuckoo wasps are parasitic in nature and like their namesake the Cuckoo bird, depend on other species for survival. They came to North America as larvae stowed

away in wooden pallets on sailing ships, with their improbable but, timely emergence upon arrival to ports in the U.S.

Certainly, Cuckoo wasps are not on the list for any parenting awards and their role is more befitting of the lowlife insect,

cheating its way through life, taking the easy road laid down by the hard work of others. However you might feel about the checks and balances system of evolved nature, it should not preclude our interest in learning about it.

The challenge for the female Cuckoo

wasp is to find an underground burrow or nest of bees or wasps and wait for the owner to bring in food for their larvae.



The female must sneak into the nest to deposit her own egg larvae. As you can imagine they are often caught by the parents proper and thus begins the eviction process. Cuckoo wasp can roll up into a ball while their tough exoskeletons protect them from stings and bites. This leaves the defenders with no choice

but to simply carry the armored ball out of the nest where they are dropped, and the Cuckoo wasp simply goes about the process again.

Not unlike our current day to day, adapting and moving forward. 🌱

Rain Lilies

By Cindy Chrisler

My family relocated to Georgetown last year after living in Southern California for 30 years. I'm originally from Houston, so I am re-introducing myself to the local fauna, which differs from that in the Houston area. I've been particularly taken with rain lilies, *Cooperia pedunculata* and *Cooperia drummondii*, which have popped up in my yard, in vacant lots, in pastures, and along roadsides.

Rain lilies are perennials that form a bulb about eight inches below the soil surface. They send up a naked stalk and produce a single flower a few days after an adequate rain. They produce a light scent, which I have only noticed when I came across a



large stand in a vacant lot near my house.

C. pedunculata blooms in the spring, and *C drummondii* blooms in the fall. As a member of the lily family, the flower parts are in multiples of three. Although

a rain lily looks like it has six petals, there are actually three petals and three sepals, which are also white. The flower opens in the afternoon and is relatively short lived, about three or four days. The stalk then bulges as the ovary develops and seeds mature. After a few days the ovary will dehisce exposing black



seeds in three chambers, like their cousins the yuccas. If you care to harvest seeds, they should be planted or scattered soon after harvesting as they lose

viability when stored. The bulb may also send up leaves, which are narrow and long and may be mistaken for grass. Rain lilies tolerate dry conditions and mowing. 🌱

Source: Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center website, https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=cope

SNOW DAY IN CENTRAL TEXAS!

BERRY SPRINGS PARK & PRESERVE



GAREY PARK



RIVER RANCH



Member Certifications

Volunteer Name	Initial Certification	Recertification	Class
Cater, Robert	5/14/2020	10/24/2020	2019 (Fall)
Chrisler, Cindy	9/29/2020		2020 (Spring)
Cochran, Jack	6/11/2020	8/28/2020	2020 (Spring)
Frazier, Marc	5/16/2017	10/12/2020	2016 (Spring)
Koschoreck, Sonia	11/30/2020		2020 (Spring)
LeFan, Emily	10/28/2018	10/16/2020	2018 (Fall)
Meyer, Rick	12/1/2020		2020 (Spring)
Murphy, Betsy	11/18/2016	12/3/2020	2016 (Spring)
Neville, Theresa	12/15/2018	8/25/2020	2018 (Fall)
Raymond, Doug	10/14/2020	12/1/2020	2019 (Fall)
Shirk, Pat	3/1/2011	9/24/2020	2010
Spiller, Jennifer	5/12/2016	11/26/2020	2015
Woods-Nunn, Jessica	3/1/2014	12/3/2020	2011

Invasion of the Bluebirds

Story and Photos by Jack Cochran

I'm sure everyone in Central Texas is familiar with the Eastern Bluebird, which is readily seen year-round, especially at Berry Springs Park and Preserve where

Good Water Master Naturalists monitor nesting boxes in season. The boxes are greatly responsible for

their comeback from population declines created from loss of natural cavities for nesting, and competition from introduced birds like European Starlings and House Sparrows. I've even had Eastern Bluebirds nest in my suburban backyard box, and enjoyed feeding the adults and young birds mealworms right off the back porch.

In west Williamson County (WilCo) this winter we've been lucky enough to host the other two North American bluebirds: Western Bluebird and Mountain Bluebird. These two species are rare visitors from the west. In fact, the first WilCo record for

Western Bluebird was in November 2020. The male Western Bluebird is distinguished from its Eastern cousin by its bright blue head and throat (Eastern male has an orange throat), and its chestnut scapulars (shoulder feathers). Male Mountain Bluebirds are a



striking sky-blue overall, making them unmistakable. The females of all the bluebird species are more subtly plumaged; refer to a field guide for help in picking them out.

I've made several trips to enjoy the WilCo bluebirds, watching them eating berries (e.g., Prairie Flameleaf Sumac, Ashe Juniper) and insects. Western Bluebirds, numbering up to about 15 birds this season, like to perch on oaks, brush piles,

fence lines, and even the ground, while looking for food. The Mountain Bluebirds, many in large flocks (I had one

of 80 recently), will pile into a sumac tree and quickly strip it of berries. They also sally forth from a fence or fly up from the ground for hover foraging, dropping on insects when



spotted. Sometimes all three bluebird species have been seen in the same west WilCo area, feeding together. Observing these birds from a vehicle used as a blind often provides close-up encounters. After spotting birds, I park, kill the motor, and enjoy. While car birding is easy, remember to pull well off the road where you can be seen by passing traffic, and respect private property.

Unfortunately, by the time this article is published these beautiful visitors may have departed for their spring territories. If you didn't see them this winter, enjoy the accompanying photographs until their next visit. And if you want to be alerted to particular bird sightings, while also con-



tributing your own, consider signing up on the citizen science site, eBird (ebird.org).

Photos in order of appearance:
An Eastern Bluebird enjoying the water in the author's backyard.

Western Bluebird in west Williamson County this winter. This male is distinguished by its blue head and throat, and its chestnut shoulders and back.

Western Bluebird on a fence in west Williamson County.



Mountain Bluebird in west Williamson County this winter. A beautiful sky-blue male is preparing to dive on an insect.

Mountain Bluebird reflecting on a beautiful west Williamson County evening.

A map of the area in west Williamson County where Western Bluebirds and Mountain Bluebirds have been seen in the winter of 2020-2021. The markers indicate Western Bluebird sightings from eBird. 🌿



Highly Mediocre Mini Acre

Story and Photos by April Rohlich

Highly mediocre results were my aim when I decided to add Green Antelopehorn Milkweed to my yard this year. I wanted to further spice up the ecological significance of my ordinary yard. I only expected to establish some nice taproots and enjoy slightly more success next season.



milkweed bugs. We were in a good groove with Monarchs laying eggs which developed into hungry cats.

The many mini-cats grew quickly. They ate and pooped. I was fascinated with their bright green cylindrical cat scat that would roll off their leaf into a pile on the leaf below.



Monarch chrysalis.

Nine days after forming her pupa stage, she enclosed. I witnessed the testing, walking, and winging before taking her first flights. It has been an engaging experience having witnessed the full cycle.

I purchased a flat of seedlings appropriate to my zip code through MonarchWatch milkweed marketplace. Once planted, prosperity came quickly when I discovered three queen caterpillars (cats) feasting on my immature plants. I knew I could not handle the three hungry teenagers, so I farmed them out to a neighbor with more mature plants.



I do believe many of them metamorphosed into adults and flew off to Mexico, but I found only one spent chrysalis.

In early Fall, I noticed a Guinea Paper Wasp circling, then landing on one of my cats. I observed that it had knocked down one and was poised to slurp up the other. The two have similar coloration so I may have missed the wasps devouring earlier cats. I covered the remaining cats with an upturned mesh drawer to keep them safe. Several took their turn making a little webbing, attaching, and making the familiar J shape. Only one was successful in transforming into the awesome green dome with glistening gold jewels of the



I have decided to continue forward in a free-range mind-set. I am aware and content that some will be yummy wasp food. There are far more specialized interactions in my pocket prairie than I can conceive of or attempt to control. It turns out that nature is not a modicum of mediocrity. She is exquisite. 🦋

www.MonarchWatch.org
www.JossGrowers.com



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Birds are everywhere, all the time, doing fascinating things. Join The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Audubon Society, and Birds Canada on February 12-15, 2021 when the world comes together for the love of birds. 🦋 <https://www.birdcount.org>

Bobcats – Elusive Predators

By Mary Ann Melton

We set up a critter camera last summer because we knew we had wild critters going up and down our driveway at night. We kept finding traces of their passage. We live on five acres and have always had wild creatures show up. It has been fun to document them even when their appearance is in the dead of night while we are asleep. Most of the photos have been at night with infrared – not great photography but ideal for documentation. I was thrilled when

we got the first bobcat photo. I knew that in the past there had been a bobcat down the road from us, but we had never seen evidence at our home. Now we had evidence that we have one making regular appearances. A recent appearance early in



the morning gave us a good clear look at this elusive creature.

Bobcats are medium-sized wild cats. They have red brown or gray fur with a white underbelly, ears are tipped with small tufts, and the fur is longer on the sides of its head forming a rough. Tail size can vary, but it is shorter than other wild cat species with a black tip. They are about two-feet tall from shoulders to their feet and weigh 20-30 pounds. About twice the size of the average house cat. They have excellent eyesight and hearing. Bobcats are found from central Mexico north into Canada. They adapt well to diverse habitats – forests, swamps, deserts, and even suburban areas.

Bobcats are solitary creatures and mark their territory with urine, feces, scent

markings, scratches, and scrapes. They drop feces on large rocks on promontories or ridges and make small piles of leaves and sticks to urinate on along their travel routes. Male ranges may overlap but female ranges rarely do. Ranges may be less than a square mile to more than 20 miles.

Dens are usually crevices along canyon walls, boulder piles, or in thickets. They are expert tree climbers and may seek refuge there, but they prefer rocky ledges in a thicket. They are also good swimmers.

Hunting is done primarily at night but they may begin hunting before sundown. Diet is small mammals such as rats, ground squirrels, mice, skunks, raccoons, moles, and rabbits.

They also eat birds and reptiles. When hunting, they wait motionless before pouncing. With midsize prey, bobcats stalk and then pounce grabbing the neck to cut the spinal cord. While they can take a deer, most deer meat found in their stomachs is carrion. When hunting deer, they wait until the deer has bedded down. They will also prey upon sheep, goats, and poultry, but rarely do much damage.

Breeding begins in February with a gestation period of about 60 days. Litters range from two to seven with an average of three. The kittens are well furred with spots and their eyes open around day nine. They are weaned about two months and stay with their mom until early fall when they begin to hunt for themselves.



For more information about the Good Water Chapter contact us at:

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