



Naturalist Notes

Arboretum Thursday

Thursday again.
Time for the Arboretum. Parking is free.

Buttonbush, Inner Loop Trail to Prairie Field Station. Water snake, caterpillar. So many butterflies!

Watching people on Meadow Trail separate together.

The smell of pine needles, a little wet, warmed by the sun, reminders of hikes and campouts, good memories, something to look forward to, once parks are open.

Bird song in the trees, one blue jay maybe, can't tell the other.
Two vultures circling in the distance, so much for birding.

Irmi Willcockson, April 23rd, 2020



JULY
18-26
2020

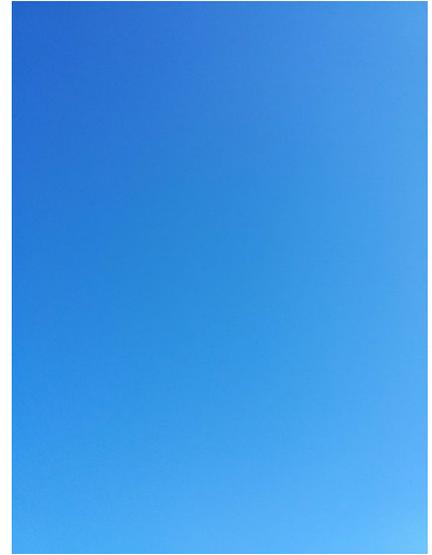


SKY OF THE MONTH

Sunlight consists of all wavelengths of visible light. Blue light has the shortest wavelength, and the molecules in the atmosphere scatter it more than other wavelength. Sunlight passes through more of the atmosphere closer to the horizon. This results in more scatter, in addition to light being reflected from the Earth's surface. Both of these together result in lighter blue or white sky closer to the horizon.

In June, a large dust cloud from the Sahara gave a milky tone to the sky, because the dust scatters even more light. The dust cloud also suppresses hurricane formation, and produces more colorful sunsets.

This picture was taken July 24th, 2019.



Ecology In Action

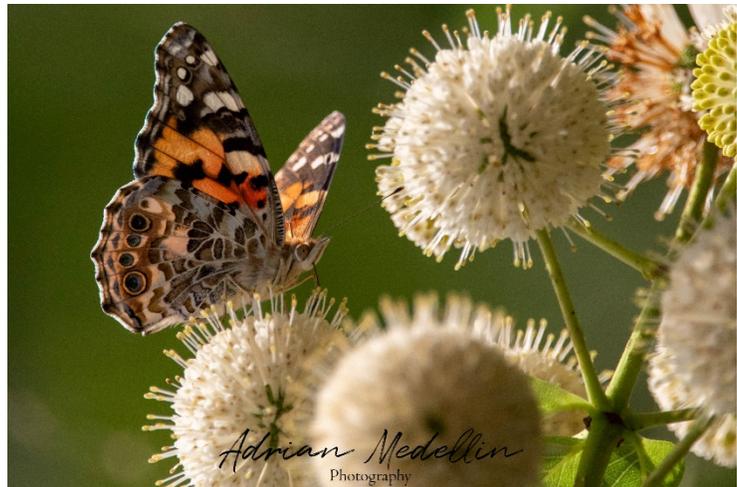
“Probably we never fully credit the interdependence of wild creatures, and their cognizance of the affairs of their own kind. When the five coyotes that range the Tejon from Pasteria to Tunawai planned a relay race to bring down an antelope strayed from the band, beside myself to watch, an eagle swung down from Mt. Pinos, buzzards materialized out of invisible ether, and hawks came trooping like small boys to a street fight. Rabbits sat up in the chaparral and cocked their ears, feeling themselves quite safe for the once as the hunt swung near them. Nothing happens in the deep wood that the blue jays are not all agog to tell. The hawk follows the badger, the coyote the carrion crow, and from their aerial stations the buzzards watch each other. What would be worth knowing is how much of their neighbor's affairs the new generations learn for themselves, and how much they are taught of their elders.”

Mary Hunter Austin “The Land of Little Rain”
1903

Mental Health Care During A Pandemic: How Wildlife Photography Helped Me

Social distancing has become an all too familiar term to us during the past few months. We know that social distance is necessary in preventing the spread of Covid-19 along with handwashing, wearing masks, and other public health practices. The pandemic has shown us the physical harm the virus can cause our bodies, but what about the mental health effects? Social distancing can cause a lot of stress, fear, and anxiety in individuals isolating, and it is important to speak up about it. I have had minor trouble adjusting, especially because I have been working at the mobile testing sites and it has been busy. Although I recognize I am privileged to still have a job, coming home exhausted just to self-isolate has been stressful. Cutting out the social activities and dinners that help me relax was taking a toll on me. While cleaning one day I saw my camera (which I had not touched in ages) just sitting there and decided that maybe I will take it out with me to a park on a day off. I mean I would still be social distancing, wearing a mask, and getting some of the stress relief that nature has to offer.

I began in spring during the first part of the shutdown. This was perfect for spring migration. Although most of the sanctuaries were closed, I was able to go to some local non-mainstream locations and find some neat birds. I started to upload and share my pictures through the Instagram social media platform, and it was one of the best decisions I made. It is not often I can find other millennials in the city who are also self-proclaimed nature nerds or outdoor hobbyist. Once I started sharing my photos on Instagram, I was able to connect with



A Painted Lady siphoning nectar from a Buttonbush during sunset at Mason Park

credit Adrian Medellin

other people of all ages, races, and of different places. At this point it made me feel like I was a part of a group, even while social distancing. I was making it a habit to go out once a week if possible and photograph flora and fauna because I could not wait to share my finds. If I did not know what it was, I could look it up through a field guide, google it, or use google lens or iNaturalist to help me identify it. Since I really enjoyed documenting and sharing my finds, I decided to invest in a newer camera and a newer long-distance lens. I even picked up some photoshop skills during my time in lockdown. Now I am using my Instagram platform for conservation education, and really enjoy my wildlife photography hobby even more than before.

Having continued and advanced in wildlife photography during the lockdown was a great decision to help with my stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic. I can be in nature around the trees and sounds of animals. I am also able to connect with other outdoor enthusiast from different cities, states, countries, and even continents, from my own home through a social media platform. Although social media gets a lot of negative criticism, in this case it worked out well for me. Pictured is one of my favorite shots while out at Mason Park in the Greater East End Neighborhood

of Houston. I would be happy contribute photos for any future TGCMN events, if needed. If you would like to view some of my more recent photos you can do so by visiting www.instagram.com/adrian_medellin_photography

Adrian Medellin



 **Organism of the Month**

Gulf Pipefish (*Sygnathus scovelli*)

This elongated fish observed at the new canoe launch at Big Island Slough Park appears to be a gulf pipefish.

Gulf pipefish are a marine estuarine species, commonly inhabiting shallow, well vegetated shores. They are found from the Atlantic side of north Georgia through the Gulf of Mexico and south to Brazil. Populations have been found in Lake Texana, about fifty miles from shore.

Feeding during the day, gulf pipefish eat small crustaceans such as copepods and isopods.

Knowledge on reproduction is limited. Spawning may occur in salt, brackish, or fresh water all year. In the Gulf, spawning is less frequent in the winter. Mature males develop a brood pouch, and may incubate the eggs of more than one female.



Gulf pipefish and minnows in Big Island Slough

Source: Wikipedia

Homegrown National Park



“Homegrown National Park” is the term coined by Douglas Tallamy in his book, [*Nature’s Best Hope – A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard*](#) (Timber Press 2019, 254 pp.) to describe the idea and goal of restoring ecosystem function by having homeowners everywhere convert at least part of their yards, front as well as back, to native plantings, particularly those that have been found to be the most productive in providing support for native wildlife. This big idea is premised on an urgently needed “humans and nature” ethic (as opposed to the reigning “humans or nature” ethic) and on the role of connectivity in supporting the resiliency of populations of species.

“Restoring habitat where we live and work, and to a lesser extent where we farm and graze, will go a long way toward building biological corridors that connect preserved habitat fragments with one another.” (p.61).

While it may not happen overnight, renaturing our immediate environment is an idea that can spread through social influence, neighbor to neighbor, neighborhood to neighborhood. It is an idea that has already spread outside of the United States as is evidenced in the [Agroecology](#) movement that is making such a difference for small farmers and their environment wherever it is implemented. It is a transformative idea that we as Master Naturalists can spread through our interactions with people in our volunteering and outreach work and help become an environment enriching reality.

“Building Homegrown National Park will be the most ambitious restoration initiative ever undertaken. We will create a sustainable balance between humans and other earthlings in the United States (hey, why not the whole globe?), and we will do it by living with nature instead of living apart from it. Instead of denaturing our environment as if it didn't matter, our new national pastime will be to renature our surrounds. Restoring ecosystem function can become a goal that unites rather than divides us; Homegrown National Park will have no political, ideological, religious, cultural, or geographic boundaries because everyone-every human being on this planet-needs diverse, highly productive ecosystems to survive. We must replace our current "humans or nature" mentality with a new "humans and nature" ethic. Many of us have already begun this worthy task, and the results are immediate, encouraging, and enormously satisfying. Imagine the sense of accomplishment that will come from having a role in life's salvation.” (p. 214)

Bob Romero