



Naturalist Notes

President's Message

Well it's August and what can I say but it's hot! August is not my favorite month. Thanks to the heat and humidity I find it hard to get outside to do much of anything. As a result, my back yard is a jungle of overgrown garden beds and unwanted non-native weeds. The plants I have planted are suffering in the unrelenting heat and sun. I look forward to cooler months and fall foliage to repair the damage and return the area back into something to admire.

Recently I had an opportunity to explore Bastrop State Park which was devastated by fire in 2011. While there's lots of young trees growing and signs of renewal, the park still has decades to go before it recovers. I didn't spend long there as the midday heat and sun were too much to bear and most of the wildlife had retreated to cooler spots. Sadly, there wasn't much to see that day except for many determined lizards hunting the grasshoppers that seemed to cover the ground and underbrush. There aren't many shady spots in the park left to stop and catch your breath. Like Bastrop, we are in the midst of the wildfire pandemic that is COVID-19 and I wonder how long it will take us to recover. I don't have an answer so I continue to hope that it will be sooner rather than later. We will just have to wait and see, I guess.

As you hopefully all know, registration for the annual virtual meeting is open. I registered last week. I am looking forward to many of the presentations. I hope you all are as well. I don't have a date for when we may return to in-person volunteering and meetings, but I will let everyone know as soon as possible when there is a change. Look out for announcements regarding the fundraiser we will be hosting as part of the annual meeting.

Stay safe everyone!!

Rebecca Lloyd

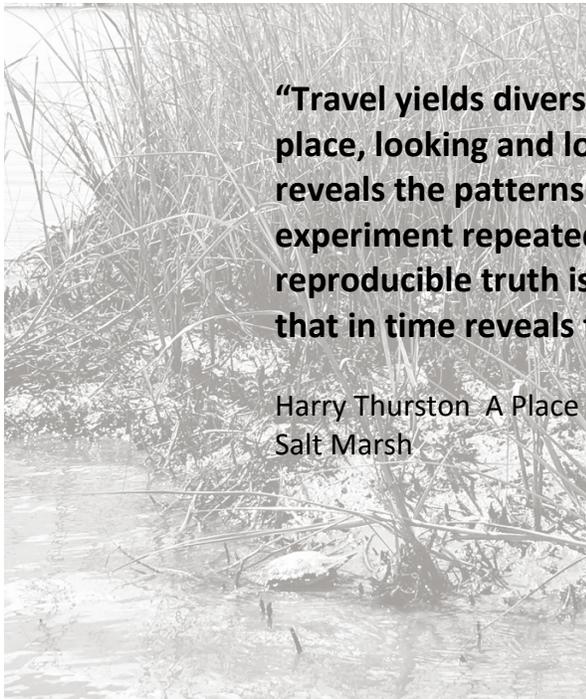
SKY OF THE MONTH



Since most of the pictures I took in August 2019 show cumulus clouds in their various forms, I decided to include my attempt at surrealism here.

The picture was taken through the window of one of the Texas Medical Center buildings. The lights appear to create highways in the clouds pointing towards downtown.

The picture was taken Aug 20th, 2019.



“Travel yields diversity; residence, intimacy. Staying in one place, looking and looking while the seasons rotate around you, reveals the patterns inherent in the familiar. It is like an experiment repeated over and over again, until some reproducible truth is teased out. Probability becomes an ally that in time reveals the sublime, snares the evanescent.”

Harry Thurston A Place Between The Tides - A Naturalist's Reflections on the Salt Marsh

Tiny Treasures – under the mower blades!

As we are both educated and encouraged to increase the diversity of native plants in our home landscapes to support the wide range of pollinators and birds that are under threat, one overlooked niche may be under the mower blades!

As a beekeeper, I am thankful for the early flowering clovers, in grassy areas in my neighborhood, although they are frowned upon by many residents as weeds in their lawns! They help sustain the earliest of our nectar seekers. As a naturalist I note the *Herbertia*, *Sabatia*, and the sprawling legumes, *Neptunia* and *Mimosa* spp., that are native “weeds” supporting the more specialist native bees and butterflies.



Tropical Puff (*Neptunia pubescens*), a host plant for the **Cereneus Blue** (*Hemiargus ceraunus*) butterfly. credit Julie d'Ablaing

On the almost desolate, non-irrigated mowed grass areas of the Copperfield Trail, dominated by Bermuda grass, Tropical Puff *Neptunia pubescens*), a creeping herb with small yellow flowers manages to thrive. This plant, is in the pea family, and has sensitive leaflets that close when touched (NB. Never ending entertainment for kids and adults alike!). It is drought tolerant, probably due to a significant tap root.

I have recently been trying to reach out to my neighbors who walk along this gas easement mowed wasteland to challenge them to notice these little treasures; both the plant and the associated butterfly with a short article tucked into the Landscape Committee section of the free local newspaper.

“.....Just as Monarch Butterflies need native milkweeds to lay their eggs on and to raise their caterpillars, so the Ceranus Blue (*Hemiargus ceraunus*) butterflies use these plants as a host plant. This beautiful butterfly is tiny, smaller than a dime! So on your next walk along the Copperfield Trail take a closer look for these tiny treasures!”

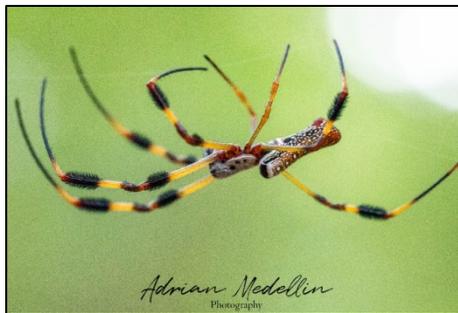
The challenge continues to be to increase awareness of the ecological value of our landscaping, while maintaining the aesthetics that all expect.

Julie d'Ablaing


Organism of the Month
Golden Silk Orb-Weaver (*Trichonephila clavipes*)

The Golden Silk Orb-Weaver (*Trichonephila clavipes*) is well known to most outdoor lovers along the southeastern United States. The Golden Silk Orb-Weaver is the only species of the genus occurring in the Western Hemisphere. Other larger relatives can be found in Asia and Madagascar. It is particularly despised by hikers and hunters in the late summer due to the webs making for a sticky trap for the unwary explorers. Bites usually only occur when people attempt to handle or pinch them and would produce only localized pain or redness. Their prey consists of a wide variety of small to medium-sized flying insects, including flies, bees, wasps, and small moths and butterflies. These spiders have also evolved to handle high temperatures and prevent overheating. The silvery carapace reflects sunlight, while the long, cylindrical body may be pointed directly at the sun, thus reducing the area of exposed body surface. Be on the lookout for this yellow and black spider next time you are out in a heavily wooded area.

Adrian Medellin

**In Memoriam****Dr. Larry Brown (7/16/1937 - 7/2/2020)**

Anita Tiller of Mercer Arboretum, which now houses Dr Brown's herbarium, was contacted by the family of Dr. Brown about his passing and related that the funeral will be private, family only, and a memorial service will be planned for a later date. No date or details for the memorial has been set.

Lan Shen and Katy Emde

For more remembrances and to add your own, please visit

<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/houston-tx/larry-brown-9249338>



Claims that insects will disappear within a century are absurd, but the reality isn't reassuring either.

You may have recently read or heard reports of precipitous insect declines over the last thirty years. The reality is that our picture is woefully incomplete. Our knowledge of species numbers and populations sizes, much less of the causes of decline of individual

species, is nowhere near where it needs to be in order to quantify definitively what is happening, much less make the claim that an “insect apocalypse” is upon us. The latter claim is an implausible one for a human to make since insects will most certainly be the last ones standing of the Kingdom *Animalia*.

This situation, in which there is such a dearth of needed information, has nevertheless the positive benefit of bringing our attention to this key group of animals that are crucial to life as we know it. While it is clear that an “apocalypse” is not happening, it is very clear that factors such as, first and foremost, habitat loss (such as the transformation of wild spaces into agricultural land, land development, etc.), concomitant pesticide and herbicide use, some forms of pollution, introduced species and climate change, are involved in the declines of insect species and populations that have been studied or anecdotally observed. These same factors are also the very issues that also affect humans negatively in one way or another and that have been talked about, written about and highlighted over the past thirty years and longer.

This means that many of the human activities (and their scale), which are intended to, and do, produce some benefits for people, also harm people, often indirectly and only over time in ways that are often not readily noticeable. But very importantly, these human activities have also been coming together to definitely negatively affect to some significant degree the dominant form of animal life on the planet, insects, which are essential to the web of life. While the picture is very incomplete, the observed declines in insects are much more readily noticeable and can help us to realize that we are all in this together and are being affected by many of the same factors.

Similarly, the unrelenting reports of declines in some charismatic species of the insect world, e. g., Monarch butterflies and native bees, grab our attention and alert us that something is wrong but mainly draw our attention to a single species or to the [clade](#), in this case, the clade *Anthophila* (bees) and not to the scale of the problem for so much of the class *Insecta* and the serious effects of these declines on the food web. And since clear declines are being seen in a wide number of species and populations of this by far largest group of animals, it is the scale of the problem that is the issue as well as the multiplicity of the apparent causes of the declines.

This is where we as Master Naturalists come in. We get to educate ourselves and all the people we come into contact with in the course of our volunteering activities about the scale and complexity of the issue and what can be done about it. Some of the most significant and immediately doable things that can be done are introducing native plants (without chemical inputs) in our yards as well as advocating for the conservation of wild spaces and the incorporation of native plants (again without chemical inputs) into public and private infrastructure spaces. These are important ways of countering not only the decline of many insect species and populations and the associated decline

in the quality of our environment but are also a key part of counteracting the causes of these declines. Our mission as Texas Master Naturalists is “to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas” within our communities. So educating the public about what they can do to support insects, and therefore the food web, at home and as involved community members is, I think, a key place where we can actually make a difference in addressing this big issue. The results of our efforts will enrich our and everyone’s lives.

The following two articles summarize what little is known so far and the much that is not yet known about the decline of insect species and populations:

- [Is the Insect Apocalypse Really Upon Us?](#)
Claims that insects will disappear within a century are absurd, but the reality isn't reassuring either. By **ED YONG** FEBRUARY 19, 2019 [The Atlantic](#)
- [As Insect Populations Decline, Scientists Are Trying to Understand Why](#)
The real story behind reports of an “insect Armageddon” is more nuanced—but probably just as unsettling. By [Mary Hoff](#), [Ensia](#) on November 1, 2018 [Scientific American](#)

Bob Romero



2019 Galveston Bay Report Card

The report card was released in August, I’m including an excerpt in this newsletter. Future newsletters will include other excerpts.

Water Quality - B (Good)

The Galveston Bay watershed received a B for water quality samples collected in 2018. This year’s good grade is consistent with long-term trends of generally improving water quality as a result of Clean Water Act implementation and ongoing implementation of Watershed Protection Plans in our region (locally-driven, watershed-specific plans to voluntarily address complex water quality problems in the region). 2018 was not as rainy as previous years, which may explain the increase in phosphorus levels in some watersheds back to 2014 levels. As the Galveston Bay watershed’s human population grows, more land is developed for homes, businesses, and transportation infrastructure. In response to changes in land use, new strategies will be needed to keep the Bay from being overloaded with nutrients that degrade water quality.

Galveston Bay Foundation continues its Land Conservation Efforts with Acquisition of Flo Hannah Prairie in Brazoria County

Last week, the Galveston Bay Foundation acquired 79 acres of remnant coastal prairie in Brazoria County, as part of its continued effort to conserve coastal habitat through property acquisitions and conservation easements. Conserved land provides clean water, recreational opportunities, scenic beauty, a refuge for wildlife, and a host of other benefits.

“The Texas Coast was once home to an estimated 6 million acres of coastal prairie. Today, less than one percent of that coastal prairie remains in a relatively pristine condition,” said Bob Stokes, Galveston Bay Foundation’s president. “At this point, every acre of conserved remnant prairie in our region is important. In terms of its biological value, Flo Hannah Prairie has been compared to Nash Prairie, another large remnant coastal prairie that has been conserved, so we are excited to be able to preserve this Texas coast treasure for generations to come.”

A remnant prairie is defined as an isolated prairie site with original vegetation, very little if any non-native species and undisturbed topographic features. Strategically located off County Road 213, north of the Brazoria National Wildlife Reserve, the acquisition site is adjacent to a 35-acre tract that The Galveston Bay Foundation previously acquired in 2019 — for a total of 114 acres that have now been preserved in the area.

The site will be named the “Flo Hannah Prairie” after Flo Hannah, a Galveston native and a renowned conservationist and prairie enthusiast, who passed away from cancer in 2018. A steward for the environment and the Upper Texas Gulf Coast, Hannah was passionate about native grasses and did meaningful work in native prairie plant restoration through her role at Houston Audubon Society, her own nursery of Gulf Coast Prairie plants, and her involvement with several local nature conservancies. Among her many contributions, she was involved in preserving the Deer Park Prairie and Nash Prairie — two other important remnant prairie tracts that have been conserved in the Houston region in recent years. The Galveston Bay Foundation intends to have a dedication ceremony of the Flo Hannah Prairie this fall.

Galveston Bay Foundation July 8th, 2020

WIPES CLOG PIPES!

Clogs from wipes, rags, and other items trap grease and cause sanitary sewer overflows in Houston.
Only flush the three P's:



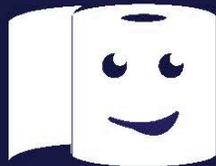
Pee

- Pee and poo are treated at our wastewater treatment plants.



Poo

- Poo breaks down and doesn't clog our wastewater pipes.



Paper

- Toilet paper dissolves in water.



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