



Naturalist Notes



Cypress Night

I am known to some as the old man of the water,
I've been here a long while but do not totter,
I was here when Comanches came riding by
On their painted ponies so swift and sly.

My feet are planted in the river's path,
Anchored deep against the river's wrath,
My knees are knobby and my leaves are thin,
But I can stand up to a pretty strong wind.

I've seen a lot in my many years,
I've got things to say if you'll open your ears,
I've watched this river for all of my time,
We have truths to tell and stories sublime.

Aldo Leopold once wrote of the scene before me,
Talking of how the river plays a symphony,
And how science wants to examine each instrument,
And misses the whole by studying the increment.

They miss the river singing to me each night,
And that we dream together until daylight,
And that I sing along as the river plays
Its song of truth with no cliches.

I sing of the gift of birds using my limbs,
And the fish that in my deep pocket swims,
The river's symphony feeds upon my whims,
And together we orchestrate river-tree hymns.

But my river must have an adequate flow,
If I'm to become an old age hero,
So the two of us depend upon your perception,
That the two of us are a worthy conception.

So I'm asking you decide what you think it's worth
To be able to listen to my river's concert,
To see me and the wind singing along with the tunes,
For if you don't value us, we will be entombed.

So welcome to Earth Church
Pull yourself up a pew
You'll hear truth in this temple
But you must do.

Jim Blackburn
Art by Isabelle Chapman

See all virus vigil poems at
<https://www.jimblackburninfo.com/virus-vigil.html>

Flower Garden Banks Marine Sanctuary Expanded

On January 19, the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary was expanded from 56 to 160 square miles. Did you know we had coral reefs off the coast of Texas and Louisiana? Surely there is too much sediment and freshwater coming in from the Mississippi. Surely the temperature swings near the coast are too great. 100 miles offshore the water should be too deep for coral. But there they are! The Flower Garden Banks are home to approximately 23 species of coral and 280 species of fish, including threatened manta rays and sharks.



NOAA

Two wonderful things have come together to create the Flower Garden Banks. The Loop Current brings warm, clear water from the Caribbean past Yucatan and up into the Gulf. From there it flows out through the Florida Strait into the Gulf Stream. The current carries the larvae of corals and other tropical creatures hoping to land in the right environment. Corals need light as well as warmth

because coral animals contain symbiotic algae that photosynthesize and supplement their filter-feeding. The maximum depth for reef coral to receive enough light is about 150 feet. The Flower Garden Banks are far out on the continental shelf, where the average depth is about 400 feet. Reef coral should not be possible here, but it has found a home - on top of salt domes!

The Gulf of Mexico first opened in the mid-Jurassic. It began as a hyper-saline sea that deposited hundreds of feet of salt over millions of years. When the ocean fully opened, continual deposition of ordinary sediment on top caused the less-dense salt to flow slowly and upwards like a lava lamp. You may be familiar with the High Island and Damon Mound salt domes but there are many more offshore. In the Flower Garden banks, the highest dome is around 55 feet below sea level.

The Flower Garden Banks are surrounded by oil and gas drilling, but the biggest threat has been boat anchoring, both large tankers and smaller dive boats. In 1990 an organization of marine scientists and sport divers installed 12 permanent boat moorings. In 1992 the East and West Flower Garden Banks became a National Marine Sanctuary, which prohibits anchoring and limits fishing and oil & gas activities. The current expansion brings the total up to 17 named banks within 19 separate polygons totaling 160 square miles. That still does not cover many other interesting communities in the Gulf, including deep-water corals further down on the continental slope. There's a lot to discover, learn, and protect out there!

Mimi Posey

Sources:

[Texas Coral Reefs](#) by Jesse Cancelmo, Texas A&M University Press, 2008

<https://www.noaa.gov/media-release/noaa-expands-flower-garden-banks-national-marine-sanctuary-in-gulf-of-mexico>

Good video and story with map: <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/news/jan21/flower-garden-banks-expansion.html>

 **Organism of the Month**
Broom Moss (*Dicranum scoparium*)

Broom Moss (*Dicranum scoparium*) is a species of bryophyte native to North America. It usually forms tufts or mats on soil in dry to moist, forested areas. The plants feature chartreuse to dark green very small leaves with stems 2-10 cm, and its leaves often sweep to one side – hence the name “broom” moss. This moss forms male reproductive organs and female reproductive organs on separate plants. Male plants develop from the rhizoids along the stems of female plants. This allows for the convenient fertilization of female plants. After fertilization occurs, female plants generally develop solitary sporophytes that consist of a spore-bearing capsule on a long slender stalk that are yellow to reddish brown at maturity. The spores in each capsule are released to the wind. Individual plants are anchored to the ground by their buried lower stems and coarse rhizoids. Broom moss prefers partial sun to medium shade and acidic soil containing humus.



It will also grow on acidic rocks if there is a thin layer of soil or other organic material across their surfaces. Ecologically, mosses break down exposed substrata, releasing nutrients for the use of more complex plants that succeed them. They also aid in soil erosion control by providing surface cover and absorbing water and they are important in the nutrient and water economy of some vegetation types. I was happy to see this nice clump near the boardwalk at the Eastern Glades, Memorial Park.

Janice Barlow

Sources: eFloras.org, britannica.com



City Nature Challenge

Observations:
Apr 30th – May 4th

Identify:
May 4th – 9th



He's poking his head into anything that might contain a tasty insect.



**BUFFALO BAYOU
PARTNERSHIP**

The Dude

Red-bellied woodpeckers abide. They don't depend on any particular food source, happy to tuck into a nice beetle or chow down on an orange. In fact, as far as citrus farmers are concerned, they are a bit too fond of oranges. RBWs are also happy to eat the eggs of other birds, nuts and vegetables. And don't forget the bird feeder. If you build it, an RBW will come.

Their favorite habitat is most of them, from hardwood bottomland to suburban homesteads, red-bellied woodpeckers are happy campers who will fit in just fine.

The only real mystery, the only truly compelling thing about this ubiquitous bird is its name. Its name is a joke. It is as though someone decided to name this bird for the least obvious thing about it, and this is a big bird with bright flashy plumage and an insignificant rusty patch deep in its belly. So yeah, let's name it for the belly patch you can barely see.

This demands an explanation. I don't have one. But I have a theory. I came to this theory through my mental hiccup every time I see this bird, *oh look, a red-headed-er-bellied woodpecker*. I cannot be the only one who has to autocorrect each time I see an RBW. That's where my theory comes from.

Someone wanted to call this a red-headed woodpecker because everything about its appearance argues that this is its name. Probably, there were portions of its range in which it was called a red-headed woodpecker. What else would you call this bird? The problem is, there is another woodpecker that is so obviously a red-headed woodpecker that it won that name going away. The red-bellied woodpecker cannot win a fair fight for the name red-headed when that other bird exists. So what to do with the second-place finisher in the red-headed woodpecker naming derby?

There are all kinds of ways birds get their common names. Some birds are named for a person (Swainson has a lot of birds to his credit). Others are named for a feature of their appearance (cedar waxwings have red wingtips that look like candle wax and they eat cedar seeds). Chickadees are named for a feature of their song.

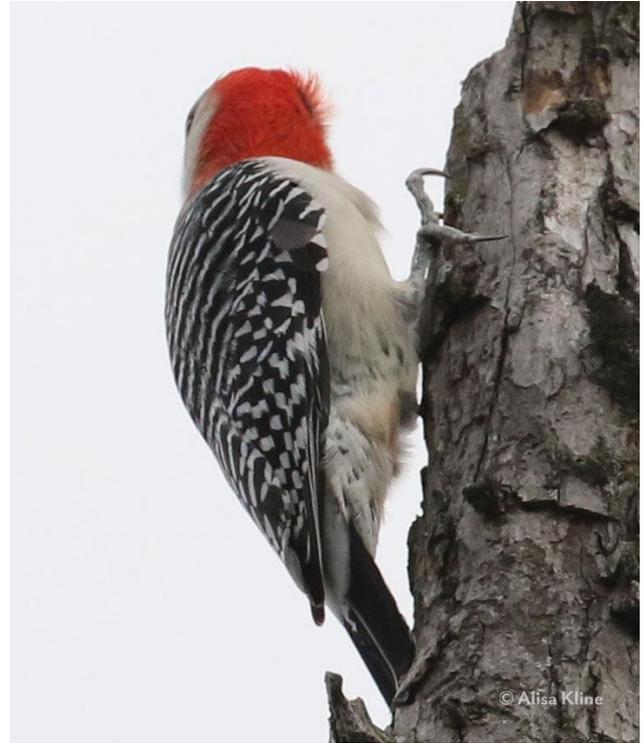
If I were in charge of naming, I might call cardinals red-wake-me-up birds because that is what they do. But some ancient persons decided that this red beauty with the peaked head resembled a cardinal of the Catholic church.

So with all these naming strategies available, someone (likely everyone) just couldn't let go of that red-headed thing. They got fixated. Since red-headed was not available, they just went with red-bellied because they could defend it and since red-bellied has the same cadence as red-headed, it was hardly a change at all.

Except it leaves you with an eternal why.

You don't have to know why a bird is named something to enjoy it and to know how to identify it but is it too much to ask that the name at least not point to something that barely exists?

You see that in the photo. That's the red belly.



Now, back to that head.

Text and photos Alisa Kline
<https://buffalobayou.org/blog/the-dude/>



“How can you be bored with nature? Landscape is infinite, isn't it?” – David Hockley

“Hockney- Van Gogh: The Joy of Nature” is currently on exhibit at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston through June 20th, 2021. While the oil paintings by Van Gogh and some of the large acrylics by Hockney are impressive, I found myself drawn to Hockney's watercolors and especially his charcoal drawings. Revisiting a location in each season, Hockney captures the changes in light and vegetation in exquisite detail. I found it well worth spending time studying his work as well as Van Gogh's. Inspiration for those of us who thrive on really looking, over and over.

Water of the Month - Eddies

Eddy is the term used for both the counterflow current created at the river's edge as well as the water's behavior when it encounters an obstacle. Each eddy caused by an obstacle is entirely unique.

Obstacle eddies are found not only in water, but also in other fluid media such as air. The fluid moves in a circular motion downstream of the obstruction.



Eddies are present in all flowing water, and even have names in big rivers. As the speed and water level increase, eddies become stronger and more dangerous for boaters. An area of turbulent water, the eddy fence, is difficult to cross, able to trap a boat. Getting trapped in an eddy can be disastrous.

Next time you are near a bayou, check out the eddies!



**Birding – the act
of enjoying wild
birds**

Freya McGregor
Birdability.org

Tech Review – Sibley Birds 2nd Edition

A favorite pastime for many of us is to spend a day birding. Part of the enjoyment of birding is to be able to accurately identify various species. Making that accurate identification is a part of the art and skill of birding and it takes a good bit practice and experience to identify birds that are not just the usual back yard species. But regardless of how skilled a birder is, even the best birders keep a bird guide handy. All birders, regardless of their experience level, typically need a reference to check on the physical appearance of a bird and its various field marks to start the process that leads to the accurate identification of that species. In addition to an image of the bird, other key attributes of the bird are also found in the guides such as behavioral traits, e.g., the way that it flies, its physical size, if the suspected bird is common or uncommon for your location and time of the year, and similar types of information. In making use of the bird guide even a novice birder has a good chance of correctly identifying the observed species. And finding and identifying a bird that is not usual for the area truly makes for a good birding day.

The typical bird guides is a book and to provide enough info for a given region, it will have some heft and bulk. And there are many excellent field bird guide books that have been reduced in size and weight to make carrying it, along with a pair of binoculars, a little easier. There is, however, an excellent alternative option to carrying the classic paperback field guide, and that is using a birding app. These apps can be loaded onto a cell phone and usually contain all the info that can be found in the book- based guides with the important addition of recordings of the songs or calls of the birds. Many experienced birders often use the bird song as the first clue as to what species may be present, so this is a key addition. The apps do not require Wi-Fi to use and therefore can be used anywhere in the field where a cell phone works. The convenience of using your cell phone, which most of us carry regardless of what we are doing, is a real advantage.

Two really good birding apps are the Sibley Birds V2 (\$19.99) and the Audubon Bird app which is free. I use both but my favorite for field use is the Sibley's. The Sibley app is essentially a replica of the excellent Sibley's book edition. Sibley makes many types of field guides and the Sibley birding book has been a popular bird guide for a long time. The reason I prefer the Sibley's app is that it, like the book, uses a somewhat standardized format of colored paintings of the birds useful for making the initial ID. The paintings are beautifully done and the standardized format makes it easier for me to quickly locate the identifying marks that have been observed. The Audubon app uses very excellent photographs of the birds and the Audubon app is extremely well done. However, the standardized structure of the Sibley bird depictions versus the variabilities of the photographic format of the Audubon bird portraits gives the Sibley's a strong edge for me and makes the expense of purchasing the app justifiable. The Audubon photos are wonderful as an ID guide to be sure, but in the field easily finding the critical ID parameters is, for me, more reliably done with the Sibley's.

I hope that a "Life Bird" will show itself to you this migration.

Greg Brazaitis, Spring 2018 Class



The Sandpiper

The sandpiper
Scampers over sand
Advances, withdraws
As breakers disband

Each wave undergoes
The bead of his eye
He pecks what it tows
Keeps himself dry

Samuel Menashe, *New and Selected Poems*

April is National Poetry Month

Samuel Menashe (1925 – 2011) wrote poems that are both compact and precise. While certainly spiritual, he never preaches. The topics of his poems range widely, from the light-hearted observation in "The Sandpiper" to themes of aging and loss. Nature features often in his poems, either as a subject or as the backdrop to his thoughts.

If you enjoy short poems that stay with you, Menashe is well worth adding to your collection.

City Nature Challenge 2021 Begins April 30th!

Charge your camera and phone and plan your routes! Get ready for the annual City Nature Challenge! Now in its 6th year, CNC is a worldwide “competition” to see which urban area can find the most biodiversity and have the most community engagement. This year over 380 cities worldwide will take part, including 14 in Texas. Here are key dates:

- April 30 – May 3: Observe! Take pictures of wild plants and animals
- May 4 – May 9: Upload and Identify! Complete upload of all observations. Identify what was found.
- May 10: Results announced

Houston-Galveston has been very competitive in CNC since its first entry in 2017, and last year was no exception. While due to covid there were no official rankings, Houston-Galveston claims bragging rights for being 1st globally for number of species observed. Let’s do it again in 2021!

You can share your love of nature and help grow CNC by:

- Spreading the word – Tell friends and family about City Nature Challenge and encourage them to participate. When asked what one thing he would like to see TMN’s do for CNC, Jaime Gonzalez of The Nature Conservancy responded, “Get two new people to do it!”
- Being an observer – All you need is an iNaturalist account, curiosity, and willingness to explore! You do not have to do anything to join the CNC project. All observations for April 30 through May 3 will be automatically added to the CNC project.
- Being an identifier – Anyone can be an identifier, but please only provide an id if you are sure of it. Focus on observations where the species is Unknown or is not yet at species level. Observations do not have to be Research grade (confirmed by at least one other identifier) for CNC purposes.
- Fostering community within iNaturalist – For Sam Kieschnick of TPWD, it’s all about nature engagement, and taking time to offer feedback and encouragement. If you notice that someone is new, perhaps number of observations is 20 or fewer, take time to say “Welcome to iNat!” in the Comment box. Or if someone has added a great photo or found something really interesting, take time to say “Great photo!”, “Great find!”, or “Neato!”

What to observe? Anything wild, i.e., was not put where it is by a human. That can be any organism from the pesky weeds in your yard to the arthropods in and around your home to species on the Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) list. Check out the Terrific 12 Native Plants and Terrific 12 Animals too. (See attached photos.)

Where to observe? The Houston-Galveston region is defined as Harris County and the seven counties immediately surrounding it--Brazoria, Chambers, Ft. Bend, Galveston, Liberty, Montgomery, Waller--plus Austin County plus about 5 miles out into the Gulf of Mexico.

(Fishing, diving or seining anyone?) Data from publicly owned lands is very valuable in helping manage those areas for wildlife. Plan to visit area state parks and national wildlife refuges, as well as your neighborhood parks.

Can I get VMS hours for CNC? Yes! You can log VMS hours both for observing and identifying. For observing, you can include travel time as long as it does not exceed onsite observation time. Be sure to include the name of the place where you observed. You can also log time for uploading your observations and identifying observations for other people. Log hours as GCMN – Data Collection.

Here are a few tips for observing:

- For the period April 30 through May 3, concentrate on capturing your observations by phone, camera, sound clip, etc. Upload your observations to iNaturalist when taking a break or back at home.
- The iNat smartphone app defaults to automatic upload. When you're in the field, uploading may be time consuming or not possible. Go to Settings > Automatic Upload and turn off auto upload.
- Are you a birder? No need to do double entry--you can load your eBird checklists to iNat! See instructions here: [Convert eBird to iNaturalist Observations - Instructions \(Courtesy of Houston Audubon, Anna Vallery\) · iNaturalist](#)

Need help getting started with iNaturalist? See Help and Video Tutorials at [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org/help).

For local updates, see the Houston-Galveston team's facebook page [\(3\) Houston-Galveston City Nature Challenge Team | Facebook](#) and Instagram and Twitter.

Have questions about CNC or using iNat? Feel free to contact me at Mary.Spolyar@txgcmn.org.

Have fun, and hope to see you in the field!

Other resources:

General information about CNC: [City Nature Challenge – City Nature Challenge](#)

Links to SGCN lists by ecoregion: [TPWD: Species of Greatest Conservation Need \(texas.gov\)](#)

For arthropods in/around your home, check out the Never Home Alone Project: ([Never Home Alone: The Wild Life of Homes · iNaturalist](#)); downloadable creature guide [PowerPoint Presentation \(robdunnlab.com\)](#)

Mary Spolyar



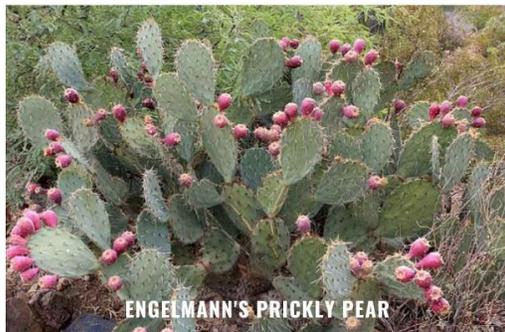
BRAZORIA PALM

THE TERRIFIC 12 NATIVE PLANTS HOUSTON-GALVESTON



City Nature Challenge 2021

WE WANT TO OBSERVE THESE SPECIAL PLANTS DURING THE 2021 CITY NATURE CHALLENGE! JOIN THE HOUSTON-GALVESTON TEAM



**WANT TO JOIN THE HOUSTON-GALVESTON TEAM?
SEARCH 'TEXAS CITY NATURE CHALLENGE'**

Species: Brazoria palm (*Sabal x brazoriensis*), dwarf sundew (*Drosera brevifolia*), Engelmann's prickly pear (*Opuntia engelmannii*), hairy corkwood (*Litorea pilosa*), Netted chain fern (*Woodwardia arcolata*), redring milkweed (*Asclepias variegata*), river cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*), short-lipped ladies' tresses (*Spiranthes brevibrans*), Texas prairie dawn (*Hymenoxys texana*), Texas windmillgrass (*Chloris texensis*), turtle grass (*Thalassia testudinum*), Virginia glasswort (*Salicornia depressa*)

PHOTO CREDITS: SUZANNE SIMPSON, ANDY NEWMAN, DONAJI GRAHAM, CHRIS KNEUPPER, JOHN WILLIAMS, ERIC KEITH



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**THE TERRIFIC 12
NATIVE WILDLIFE
HOUSTON-GALVESTON**

**City
Nature
Challenge
2021**

**WE WANT TO OBSERVE THESE SPECIAL WILDLIFE SPECIES DURING
2021 CITY NATURE CHALLENGE! JOIN THE HOUSTON-GALVESTON TEAM**



**WANT TO JOIN THE HOUSTON-GALVESTON TEAM?
SEARCH 'TEXAS CITY NATURE CHALLENGE'**

Species: cream-edged tiger beetle (*Euneta circumpecta*), southern brook lamprey (*Lichthyomyzon gagei*), Texas brown tarantula (*Aphonopelma hentzi*), brown booby (*Sula leucogaster*), diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*), red-spotted purple (*Limenitis arthemis astyanax*), striped bark scorpion (*Centruroides vittatus*), river otter (*Lontra canadensis*), Texas horned lizard (*Phrynosoma cornutum*), scarlet tanager (*Piranga olivacea*), pig frog (*Lithobates gryllus*)

PHOTO CREDITS: SCOTT EDAM, MATT BUCKINGHAM, CHAD THOMA AND FROM CANVA - PASSION4NATURE, PAUL KAMMEN, OZIELASH, DOUGFIR, WILLIAMSHERMAN, JILLIAN COOPER, WILLIAM VAN ZYL, AUGUSTINECHANG, GRACEYFLIGHT.

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