



## Naturalist Notes



Sugarcane Plumegrass Greeting The Dawn at Sheldon Lake SP – John Egan



**October 20-23, 2022**



## Holiday Gift Guide

The focus of this year's gift suggestions is on experiences, as opposed to things. My hope is that this helps us support organizations and keep the number of packages arriving at our doorstep down.



Buy a **gift card from Texas State Parks** - While you can't give an annual park pass directly to someone, you can give them a gift card which can be used to purchase a pass. Park gift cards, for any value between \$5 and \$500, can be purchased on-line, through the Customer Service Center and at most State Parks. Gift cards can be redeemed to purchase park passes, retail items or to pay for park day-use (entrance) or overnight fees.

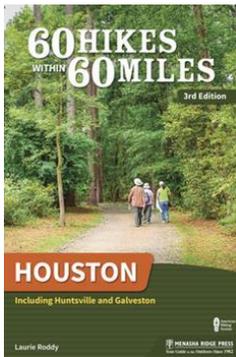
More details at

<https://texasstateparks.reserveamerica.com/giftCards.do?contractCode=TX&tti=GiftCards>

Mary Spolyar

Take a **kayak tour with Artist Boat**. Take a guided tour starting at the Coastal Heritage Preserve. Tour includes painting your own watercolor keepsake. I've done this several times, and thoroughly enjoyed it.

Irmi Willcockson



Book I got. This is going to be my 2022 priority.  
Angie Bennett

**Armand Bayou Nature Center's pontoon boat cruises** allow you to explore the bayou at different times of the day and night. For details visit

<https://www.abnc.org/pontoon-boat-cruises>

Carol Oeller,  
Jennifer Logsdon, Bev Morrison



**Spend some time in the Hill Country** at this nature-based resort. Bald Eagles nest in the area Fall through Spring. Check

<https://canyonoftheeagles.com/> for details and reservations.

Iris Poteet



Participate in a **picnic on the prairie**, either for yourself or as part of a Katy Prairie fundraiser.

Jane Wood



### **Taking macro photographs on Android phone with the XENVO Pro Kit Macro Lens: A review**

I came across the XENVO Pro Lens Kit when I was looking for a lens that I could clip onto my Android phone to use to take **close-up photography** of very small subjects, like tiny insects or pollen grains on flower anthers. The macro lens in the XENVO Pro Lens Kit looked like it would fit the bill, so I bought it.

First, the kit contains both a macro and a wide angle lens, a clamp for the lenses, a rechargeable Glowchip LED light, a quick release lanyard, front and back lens caps, a microfiber cleaning cloth and a hardened carrying case with a karabiner.

For the price (\$35-\$45), and considering what was included in the kit, I wasn't optimistic that the macro lens would produce good, clear, closeup shots. My first surprise was when I received the package. The box and lens bodies were well designed and sturdy. Their caps go on easily and straight without fear of cross threading. The lenses have some heft and are bright and clear. The carrying case is sturdy enough that I can throw it into my backpack without worrying that the lenses will be damaged. There's a USB card included, too, that has videos for how to use the lenses. And finally, XENVO offers a lifetime warranty!

My second surprise was how easy the macro lens is to use. I watched the videos and then started practicing. The Clarus 15x macro lens that comes in the kit clamps easily to your phone. Using a tripod and positioned about ½ inch from the subject, it captures sharp, fine details. And, using the pinching zoom feature of your smart phone camera app, you can zoom in to get a really sharp, super close photo.

As expected, at 15x magnification, any motion of the camera or the subject can result in a blurry photo. When I don't use a tripod, I've learned to hold my breath right before I take the picture and to stabilize the camera against something (my knees, tree trunk, etc). The macro lens has a shallow field of view. This means that the sharpest view of a subject is that part of the subject that is closest to the camera. But what's nice, is that tapping on your phone screen to make it focus on a particular part of the image means that the sharp, fine details in your photo are not always in the center of the photo. Also, if you set your camera to use the maximum amount of pixels (mine goes from 6 to 16 megapixels), you can zoom in even further in your photo editor and retain those sharp lines.

For iPhones with dual camera lenses (wide angle and telephoto), to get the best macro photos, clip and center the XENVO lens over the wide angle lens only. For Android phones with dual camera lenses, experiment to get the best results. I'm not sure these lenses will work with the new iPhones or Android phones that have three lenses.

My biggest problem with the XENVO macro lens has been in lower light situations. My phone gets tricked somehow, the camera shot looks black and then the phone locks itself. I haven't tried the Glowchip LED light yet, so perhaps that will help with the problem, too. I've really enjoyed the lens and have taken some great photos.

Overall, for the quality, ease of use and the price, I think this would make a great holiday gift for anyone who takes photos with their smart phone.

Here are some photos I've taken of Blue Mistflower (*Conoclium coelestinum*)— none edited or enhanced, using the standard lens on my Android phone, 12 megapixels, with and without the XENVO macro lens. Enjoy!

Shannon Morrison



*Figure 1 Using Android phone standard lens as close as focus allows, no XENVO macro lens and no tripod*



*Figure 2 Using XENVO macro lens on Android phone standard lens without camera zoom – no tripod*

*Figure 3 Using XENVO macro lens on Android standard lens with 50% camera zoom - no tripod*

## Water of the Month - Tides Part 1

Tides are defined as the alternate rising and falling of the water level of the ocean or sea. While most waters in the greater Houston area are not influenced by the tide, the lower, closer to Galveston Bay, parts of some bayous are tidal.

The height of tides is influenced by both the size of the body of water as well as land contours. The difference between high and low tides at the Galveston Pleasure Pier is about 3 feet at its greatest. The largest tidal range is 53.5 ft in the Bay of Fundy, Canada.

The height of high tides and the low of low tides also changes predictably. Because the moon's orbit lasts 24 hours and 50 minutes, high tide arrives about 50 minutes later each day on average, and the full cycle lasts about one month. Next month I'll finish up tides looking at more subtle characteristics of tides.



### ProPublica Releases Detailed Maps of Cancer-Causing Industrial Air Pollution in the US

“ProPublica’s analysis of five years of modeled EPA data identified more than 1,000 toxic hot spots across the country and found that an estimated 250,000 people living in them may be exposed to levels of increased cancer risk that the EPA deems unacceptable.” (ProPublica) The map on the right shows the Houston-Galveston region. Unsurprisingly, risk is concentrated around the ship channel, and disproportionately impacts communities of color. The yellow flag marks where I live. For further information, see <https://projects.propublica.org/toxmap/>

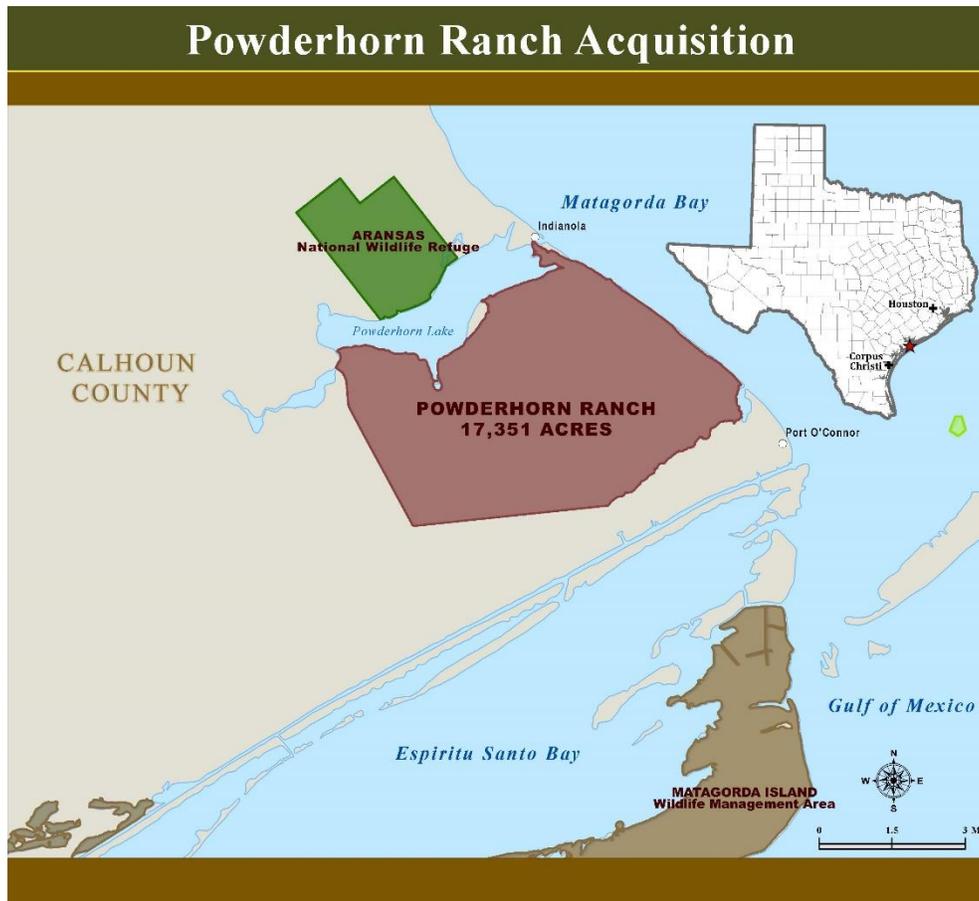
## Remainder of Powderhorn Ranch Donated to TPWD

AUSTIN — The entirety of Powderhorn Ranch is now in the hands of the people of Texas. In a land transaction that closed Oct. 27, Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation (TPWF) donated the final 1,360 acres to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). In 2018, TPWF donated 14,998 acres of the property to TPWD for Powderhorn Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The remainder of the property that transferred last week will one day become a state park.

“The donation of Powderhorn Ranch is a promise kept,” said Mike Greene, Chairman of the TPWF Board of Trustees. “This historic investment was made possible by an exceptional public-private partnership and exemplifies how landscape-scale conservation can be achieved in Texas and beyond.”

The acquisition of the 17,351-acre Powderhorn Ranch in Calhoun County forever conserves a spectacular piece of property that is one of the largest remaining tracts of unspoiled coastal prairie in the state. The purchase was made possible by a coalition of conservation partners and donors led by TPWF.

Texas Parks & Wildlife Press Release Nov 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021





## Organism of the Month Lightning Whelk (*Busycon perversum pulleyi*)

The State Shell of Texas, the lightning whelk is one of the few shells that are lefthanded, spiraling counterclockwise. Juvenile lightning whelk shells have brownish streaks reminiscent of lightning. Lightning whelks grow quickly as juveniles, then more slowly, reaching an adult length of about 8 in in 20 years. The animal inside is dark brown to black.

Lightning whelks are carnivorous from the moment they hatch, consuming unhatched siblings before moving on to oysters, clams and scallops as their main diet. They first try to pry their prey open using their own shell. If that does not work, they try to create a hole in their prey to be able to insert their radula (tongue). Predators of lightning whelks include sea gulls, crabs, and other whelks.

Credit Jared Tuszynski, wikimedia



Mating season is from late October to early January, spawning from March to April. The females lay eggs in long strings of capsules, with each capsule holding up to 200 eggs.

They range from Northern Mexico along the Gulf Coast all the way up the Eastern seaboard to North Carolina. Occasional sightings as far north as New Jersey. Although intact lightning whelk shells may be difficult to find washed up on the beach, they are not rare.

The 2022 re-certification pin is the Lightning Whelk.

Sources: TPWD, wikipedia



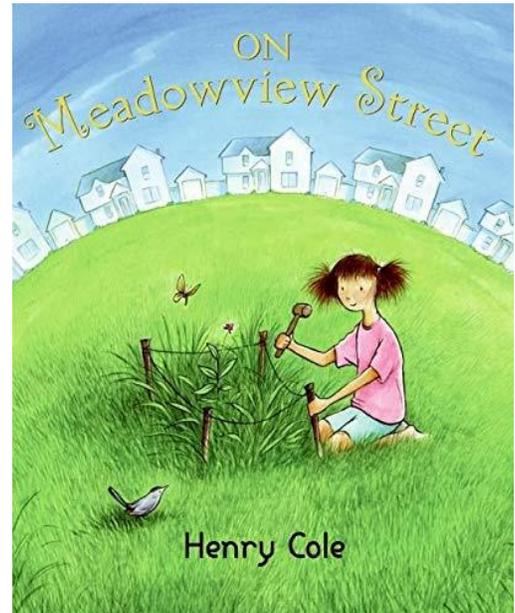
## Book Review

### On Meadowview Street

Written and Illustrated by Henry Cole, Greenwillow Books  
2007

Recommend for Kindergarten - 2<sup>nd</sup> Graders

I'll be honest, the cover of this children's book is what drew me in first. I was searching for nature/science-based books for my young son when I saw a hardback with a girl kneeling by a square of unmowed grass. It reminded me of The Prairie Ecologist's [Square Meter Photography project](#), so I decided to read it myself. I was quickly drawn in – seeing my suburban Houston neighborhood in this illustrated suburb.



The main character, Caroline, is looking forward to finding the meadow that her street is named for and instead

discovers a precious wildflower bloom in her backyard while her father is mowing the lawn. She jumps into action to protect it from the mower by using a string and some sticks to make a wildflower preserve. She observes that the more lawn she preserves the more wildlife she attracts to her yard. She decides to add shelter (a maple tree) and a water source (a simple pond). Birds take up residence, their yard is now teeming with life – several of their neighbors (instead of notifying the HOA of Caroline's changes) decide they'd like a more natural yard to spend time in too. More trees are planted, mowers are sold, ponds are dug, and new residents be they flora or fauna are cataloged and appreciated. The whole street is finally living up to its name!

This book is charmingly optimistic. The transformations that Caroline makes to her environment are not overwhelming – they're approachable and achievable for both children and adults. Even though it's a quick read (for me) at 32 pages, I recognized the quiet theme of environmental observation and how slow, positive ecological changes can benefit everyone.

It's motivational, beautifully illustrated, and an easy read for young or budding naturalists. Highly recommend if you're looking to gift a book to nature-loving child or donate to an elementary teacher's library.

Alyssa Conn

## ***Leptoglossus oppositus* : Common Name – “Stink Bug”**

The brown “tube” shown in the photo, is a series of stacked egg cases. The tubes arrived on my neighbor’s porch, located in northeast Houston, in early October. Three weeks later the animals that emerged are commonly referred to as “Stink Bugs”. In this species the nymphs are simply smaller versions of the adult. The best guess, among the numerous species of “stink bugs” that are found in Texas, is *Leptoglossus oppositus*.

The adult arrives after the fifth instar stage. Adults are about 1/2 to 3/4-inch in length and will take on a uniform brown color. Nymphal stage grouping, as shown here, is typical in that they are often found together in high numbers. The large numbers occur a sort time before they prepare to overwinter.

The bad news for my neighbor is that stink bugs are a pest animal that generally emerge around suitable food sources. In this case the food source is my neighbor’s native plant and vegetable garden. Stink bugs common in Texas are plant feeding and will feed on a wide variety of developing fruits, including peaches and tomatoes. They also eat pecan seeds, sorghum and soybeans and they will also feed on ornamental and wild plants.

They are called stink bugs because they have well developed scent glands and, while medically harmless to humans, they will emit a disagreeable odor when handled.



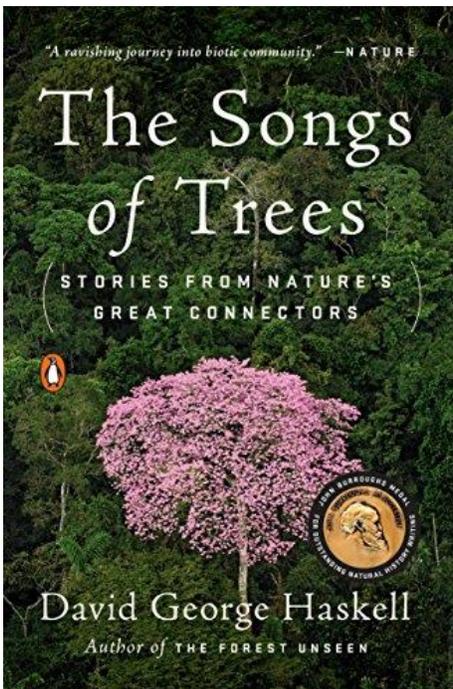
If you find these animals in your garden and you want to try to control them, please avoid insecticides and instead practice IPM (Integrated Pest Management) techniques such as using a strong water spray or hand picking to dislodge them from your plants

Greg Brazaitis



In every walk with nature one receives far more  
than he seeks.  
John Muir

Photo by Russell Toris on Flickr



**Book Review - The Songs of Trees: Stories from Nature's Great Connectors** David George Haskell, Viking, 2017, 292 pp.

As naturalists, we are interested in and are observers of the interconnectedness of nature. And we are starting to understand more and more that, contrary to the many philosophies we have been influenced by, we are an integral part of nature. This makes this book a real keeper. The intimate connections in and with nature brought forth in this book are elucidated and articulated in deft, lyrical, stimulating prose, making it a dense treasure of lucidly presented webs of connections that can be revisited time and again to one's enjoyment and one's benefit.

"For the Homeric Greeks, *kleos*, fame, was made of song. Vibrations in air contained the measure and memory of a person's life.

To listen therefore was to learn what endures.

"I turned my ear to trees, seeking ecological *kleos*. I found no heroes, no individuals around whom history pivots. Instead, living memories of trees, manifest in their songs, tell of life's community, a net of relations. We humans belong within this conversation, as blood kin and incarnate members. To listen is therefore to hear our voices and those of our family." p. ix

The author uses sound as a way of taking us with him into a world of observation of and of listening to, literally and figuratively, twelve very different trees with their webs of connections. The first group of trees (Part 1) seem disconnected from humans, just out in the wild. The second group (Part 2) consists of trees that are long dead, either fossilized or found as charcoal. The third group of trees (Part 3) lives in cities and fields. These three groups span the arc of nature, from the wild to the urban, and the arc of time, from the distant and more recent past to now and possibly portending the future.

“In all these places, tree songs emerge from relationship. Although their trunks seemingly stand as detached individuals, their lives subvert this atomistic view. We’re all—trees, humans, insects, birds, bacteria—pluralities. Life is embodied network.... We are part of the community life, composed of relationships with ‘others’,...” p. x

“The belief that nature is an Other, a separate realm defiled by the unnatural mark of humans, is a denial of our own wild being.” P. 179

This book is a product of several years of careful, repeated observations and the help of over a hundred people. It contains an extraordinary amount of contextualized and, in some cases, detailed information. It has a very full bibliography arranged by chapter and a good index.

Bob Romero



### **Willow Waterhole Greenway Receives \$4 Million Gift**

During MusicFEST last month, Vice Mayor Pro-Tem, joined by Mayor Sylvester Turner and Guy Hagstette announced that local philanthropists Rich and Nancy Kinder are donating \$2 million to the Willow Waterhole Greenway’s Conservancy and pledging an additional \$2 million to match gifts from others. The Conservancy aims to raise a total of \$10 million for upgrades, which will include trail connections to neighborhoods, additional parking, a pier, an outdoor classroom and improvements to a native prairie preserve area.

The Brays Oak Management District also received \$150,000 in Council District Service Funds from District K Council Member Martha Castex-Tatum to pave the Dryad Street (just east of Chimney Rock) entrance into the site. The project was finished just in time for the Conservancy’s successful annual MusicFEST, on Oct. 30th.

The Management District helps to maintain the Greenway along with the city Parks and Recreation Department and the Conservancy, and it partners with the conservancy on the property’s development plans.

The Office of VMPT Martha Castex-Tatum