



Naturalist Notes



My Day Today

It's interesting being on the cutting edge,
Like having one leg hanging off the ledge,
A shot of adrenalin, a pinch of fear,
It's not always fun being here.

It is one thing to be on the edge and young,
Not so aware that you might be hung,
But to be on the edge when you are old,
Is perhaps more stupid than it is bold.

Yet here I am peering into the abyss,
Careful of the steps I don't want to miss,
Fully knowing what lies down below,
No time to stop for I must go.

Aha – the abyss sucks at my feet,
To escape makes one feel among the elite,
But when the tentacles reach your ankle
I promise your brow will surely wrinkle.

So I return to the edge as an Earth defender,
To protect my mother vulnerable and tender,
Subject to abuse from those sworn to defend,
Will two-faced bureaucrats be my end?

The feds are coming after my whooping cranes,
They weren't content just to stay in their lanes,
Throwing science and their obligations to the side,
The abyss is reaching for the whoopers' hide.

The proposal to downlist those cranes I love,
Was it locally generated or from above?
Was it incompetence or an act of malintent?
From my view the proposal was devil sent.

So here I again go to the cutting edge,
Mounting a defense, throwing up a wedge,
Fighting to save this bugling being,
It's flames of battle that I am seeing.

So welcome to Earth church,
Pull yourself up a pew,
The whoopers need help,
And they're asking you.

Jim Blackburn

Painting by Isabelle Scurry Chapman

<https://www.kut.org/energy-environment/2021-12-13/biden-administration-considers-removing-whooping-cranes-from-endangered-species-list>

This family-friendly event is free, and no reservations are required. Indiangrass Preserve is located at 31975 Hebert Road, Waller, TX 77484



Christmas Bird Counts Dec 18th to Jan 5th

Find out more at

<https://houstonaudubon.org/birding/christmas-bird-counts/cbc.html>



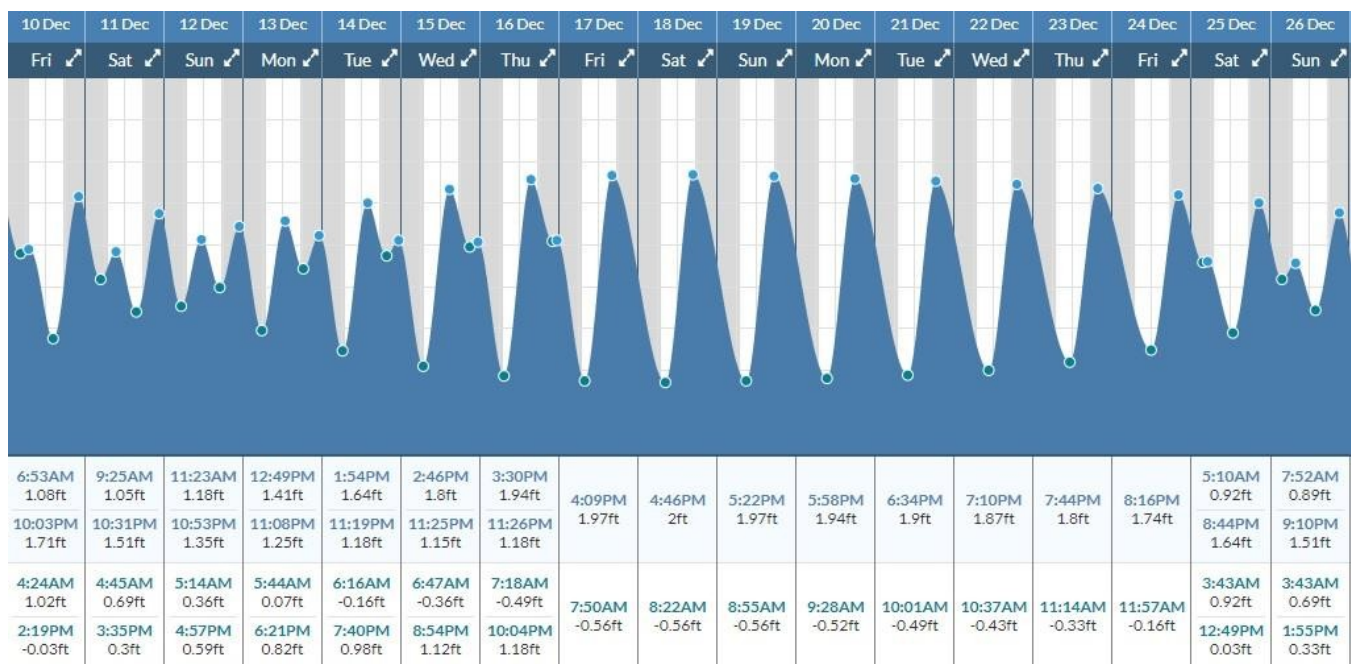
Dues are due! Please pay \$21 either online <https://txmn.org/gulfcoast/>, select the Current Members tab, and "Pay Dues" button and follow the prompts. After clicking the button, you will have an option to pay by credit card or your Paypal account. You do NOT need to have a Paypal account to pay with a credit card. Dues processed online will be \$21.00, which covers our processing fee. OR by mail GCMN, P.O. BOX 273087, Houston, TX 77277.

Water of the Month - Tides Part 2

Tidal height varies over the course of a month in the same location. This is due to the changes in position of the sun and moon relative to each other. While the sun is 27 million times more massive than the moon, it is also 400 times further from us. Therefore, the sun exerts half the gravitational effect of the moon on the ocean.

At full moon and new moon, the sun and moon are in a line, their individual effects are added. Both high and low tides are larger, known as spring tides. When the sun and moon are at 90 degrees from each other, high and low tides are the smallest, known as neap tides.

The tide table below is for Galveston for Dec 10th through 26th. Moon phases are Dec 10th – First Quarter, Dec 18th – Full Moon, and Dec 26th – Third Quarter.

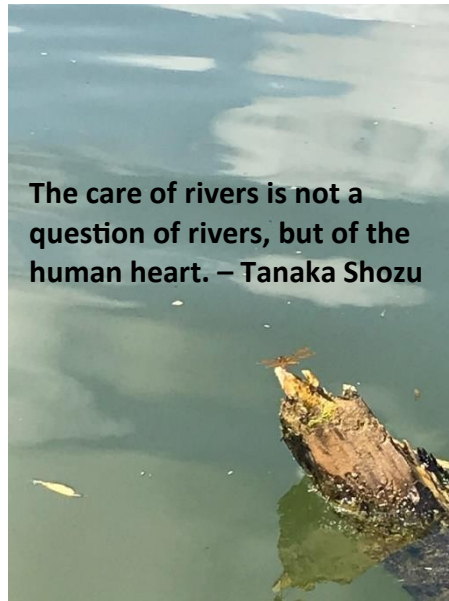


First Day Hikes

Start 2022 off with a hike. The following parks have a hike scheduled for Jan 1st:

- Stephen F. Austin SP: 9 am and 11 am
- Sheldon Lake SP: 9 am
- Goliad SP: 10 am
- Lake Summerville SP Nails Creek Unit: 10 am

If you are traveling, check out <https://tpwd.texas.gov/calendar/first-day-hikes> for the full list of state park hikes.



Identifying Feathers Using the Feather Atlas

Walking at Arthur Storey Park I came across this striking, black and white feather on the ground.



This strongly asymmetrical feather is most likely a primary flight feather. It was 'fairly large', despite having a ruler with me, I did not include it in the picture. Feathers are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, so all I did take was a picture.

Separately I came across the Feather Atlas by the US Fish and Wildlife Service Forensics Laboratory. It shows the flight feathers of many North American birds, often including juveniles and/or different color morphs. The 'Identify My Feather' resulted in unlikely candidates (Mockingbird?), so I used the 'Browse Scans' function, concentrating on Accipitriformes based on the feather size. Several hawks can be excluded based on the colors. Red-tailed, rough-legged light morph, and ferruginous hawk are possibilities. Of course, it could also be from a different order entirely!

Check out the Feather Atlas at <https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/idtool.php>

 **Organism of the Month**
Triangulate Combfoot (*Steatoda triangulosa*)

The triangulate cobweb spider, or combfoot, is a commonly found household spider. They are often nestled in dark corners of both manmade and natural structures, suspending themselves upside down in irregularly constructed webs. Their cream-colored body is covered with tiny hairs and is about $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ in length, with distinctive brown triangular markings. Their thin legs are a pale yellow with brown joints. Like other weavers, they have poor eyesight and rely on their widespread webs to alert them to predators and prey.

While they were likely introduced during the early days of U.S. colonization, these spiders have proven themselves to be quite useful for pest control in their new environments. In Texas, they are welcomed as predators for both the brown recluse and fire ants!

This particular combfoot happily lived under my counter for several months until she created this lovely egg sac. One egg sac contains around 30 spiderlings and that's a lot to have indoors! So, she and her eggs were carefully transported to a safe spot under my plant shelf outside.

Text and photo credit: Liberty Johse



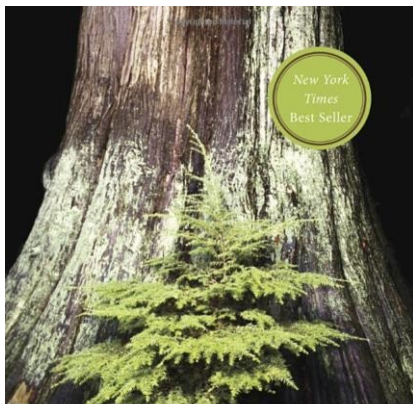
Book Review

Finding the Mother Tree

Suzanne Simard, 2021, Knopf

As one of the first generation of women foresters, Suzanne Simard saw that something was very wrong with the forestry practices at the time. Clearcutting was stripping the forest of its complexity, exposing young transplants to harsh conditions. The undergrowth was being cleared and poisoned, with the reasoning that they were “weeds” and thus interfered with the cash crop, i.e. the lumber.

But no one in the industry was willing to listen, so Simard left for academia, first as a graduate student and then as a tenured professor at the University of British Columbia.



**FINDING THE
MOTHER TREE**
Discovering the
Wisdom of the Forest
SUZANNE SIMARD

Review by Anne Mullins

Her first book, Finding the Mother Tree, is both autobiography and a chronicle of scientific discovery. As a child growing up in a logging family in Western Canada, Simard developed an understanding of the complex nature of soil and an appreciation of the way that nature can heal itself if treated with a lighter touch.

She designed experiments which proved that that poisoning the undergrowth robbed the new trees on logging plantations of necessary nutrients they needed to thrive. It was one of the early experiments that described the symbiotic relationships between species through interconnecting webs of fungi. Simard was published in the journal *Nature*, which wrote a companion piece and popularized the term “wood wide web” to describe the communication of organisms beneath the soil.

Simard’s subsequent research describes how large trees, the “Mother Trees” protect and nurture the younger trees by providing shelter and nutrients through the neural network of fungi. She also discovered that while the mother tree helps all seedlings around her, including different species, she can recognize and show preference for her own offspring.

Much of the book is about her life and how it influenced her discoveries— her childhood, marriage and family and wrestling with cancer—making us understand the link between experience and scientific inquiry. These personal stories bring clarity to the sometimes tedious descriptions of experimental design.