

January 2026



Naturalist Notes

Upcoming

Thu, Feb 5th – Monthly Chapter Meeting at HANC, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm.

Sat, Feb 21st – Accessible Trail Maintenance, HANC. Contact Richard Solberg for info.

Sat, Feb 21st – MD Anderson Prairie Rescue, 9 am to 12 pm. The plant material from this temporary prairie will be rescued and replanted at Rice University, Columbia Tap Trail, and other sites. Replanting is planned on Monday and Tuesday of that week. Watch for updates from H-NPAT.

Organism of the Month

American Crow



American Crow by Sarah Stierch, Wikimedia Commons

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**Houston Audubon
Acquires Last Piece of
Bolivar Flats Bird
Sanctuary**



Soil - Introduction

My monthly columns over the past few years have dealt with the abiotic parts of our environment, such as clouds, water, and weather. This year I want to explore soil more deeply. I know, soil is alive! However, I want to delve into the abiotic aspects – minerals, pH, particle size, soil horizons, etc.

Soil can be divided into three components

The soil matrix is the solid part of soil. It consists of minerals and organic matter. The space between these can either hold water – soil solution or gases – soil atmosphere.

Functions of Soil

Soil has several important functions:

- Medium for plant growth
- Water storage, water supply, and water purification
- Modifier of Earth's atmosphere
- Habitat for soil organisms

Soil Texture

The relative proportion of the soil mineral particles sand, silt, and clay determines soil texture. In the next part of this series, we'll examine each of these more closely.

Source: Wikipedia



Justin Hurst WMA Grows Through Land Acquisition

Texas Parks and Wildlife has authorized the acquisition of 2,500 acres next to the Justin Hurst WMA in Brazoria County. This will bring the reserve to over 17,000 acres.

Jones Creek and Live Oak loop Nature Trails are open year-round. Note that there are no restroom facilities and no drinking water available.

Organism of the Month

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

Crows are familiar to many people living in urban areas in North America. They are large, glossy black with a short beak. In flight, they continuously beat their wings and appear to be 'swimming' through the air.

Crows hide their nests in treetops against the trunk. Both partners help build the nest. Youngsters from prior broods may also help. Clutch size varies from 3-9 eggs, with a short incubation period of 16-18 days. Nestlings hatch mostly naked except for a few tufts of down. Crows fledge in 20-40 days. Crows start families of their own between 2-4 years old or older.

In some areas, crows lead two very different lives. They maintain territories and live in family groups of a mated pair and their offspring. They can also congregate in large roosts of hundreds of birds, especially in winter. Sometimes these roosts are in urban areas, leading to conflicts between crows and humans. Crows move easily between families and large groups.

Like other Corvids, crows are intelligent. They recognize individual people, mob people who have harmed them, and use tools.

Source: All About Birds



Bird of the Year – A Way to Connect More Deeply with Nature

Why have a Bird of the Year? Birds are around us in the daytime. Many are familiar, easy to find and identify even without binoculars. They may be colorful and are often doing something interesting. Paying attention to one species of bird through the seasons can draw you closer to nature.

Choosing your own Bird of the Year is easy. If you are a birder, you might have recorded the first bird that you saw in 2026. That can be your Bird of the Year. If not, or if you are not a birder, look for birds next time you are outside and choose one. You can pick one anytime and keep it for as long as you want. When you see your Bird of the Year, stop for a moment and enjoy! Watch for any interesting behaviors. If you journal, add your observations to your journal.

My Bird of the Year is the American Crow. Two crows (a pair?) regularly visit the small park close to our home. This year I want to learn about crows and these crows in particular.



From L- R: Jermal Sanders, Dawn Miller, Richard Solberg, Frankie Ortega, Diana Cooper, Leonora Breitenwischer and Jay Dryden (our photographer)

Today this group spread decomposed granite, DG, over a large area of the outer loop at the Houston Arboretum and Nature Center. The area was approx. 180' x 12'. We had several first timers, names are underlined, who did a great job. You can see the DG beneath our feet.

Kudo to all.

Our next planned workday is February 21.

Richard Solberg