The Sabal

January 2016

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Plant species page #s in the Sabal refer to:
“Plants of Deep South Texas” (PDST).

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NPP January meeting/speaker:

  Tues., Jan. 26th, 7:30pm
  at Valley Nature Center,
  301 S Border, (in Gibson Park), Weslaco.  956-969-2475.

  “Historic Naturalists of South Texas and Northeast Mexico”
  by biologist and naturalist Javier de León,
  Park Superintendent at Estero Llano Grande State Park.

His talk will delve into how naturalists first came to discover and explore our area of the world where they took the first notes about local plants and animals. Javier’s interests include native plants, butterflies, birds, dragonflies, reptiles and how to get valley residents to also admire these critters.

Photo right: Mesquite Lizard (Sceloporus grammicus) Male has blue belly. Diurnal, arboreal. Found in south TX, usually high on mesquite trunks. Diet is mostly living insects. Dark coloration in cold helps with warming. Shy. Ovoviparous. Photo by Javi Gonzalez, taken at Santa Ana NWR.

The Sabal is the newsletter of the Native Plant Project. It conveys information on native plants, habitats and environment of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas.

Previous Sabal issues are posted on our website [www.NativePlantProject.org]. Electronic versions of our Handbooks on recommended natives for landscaping are also posted there.

Change of address, missing issue, or membership: <bwessling@rgv.rr.com>
President - Ken King - <wk_king01@yahoo.com>
The addition of just one native shrub species to your yard may bring the landscape alive. Fiddlewood is wonderfully attractive. Even the leaf color will have shades of yellow, orange or red with the stress of cold, drought or extreme heat. Some specimens may bear only blooms, white clusters which attract nectarers of many types. These photos, submitted to Facebook (Rio Grande Valley Butterflies group) in late fall/early winter show an assortment of fruit/sap-feeding butterflies sucking the juice from ripened black fiddlewood berries (thus the name Negrito). If all the berries on your plant appear to shrink, closer inspection may reveal myriad winged visitors. Birds enjoy eating these berries, as well as humans such as C. Mild. Seeds within the fruits resemble tiny cloven hooves. With adequate water and good soil, this shrub grows well and quickly in cultivation. 

(Many thanks to the nature explorers who submit marvelous photos and allow us to share them here.)
Low Croton, *Croton humilis*: Photographic Champ for mid-December 2015.

In deep south Texas, many landscapes include a variety of shiny and colorful-leafed tropical crotons. None of these exotic crotons has popped up in the Facebook (Rio Grande Valley Butterflies group).

Our lowly native, Low Croton (sometimes called Dove Croton) has been the star of the Facebook RGV Butterflies group through much of December. It is a plant which is difficult to photograph, as the leaves and other surfaces of the plant are covered in “stellate” hairs (star-shaped clusters). With this in mind, we can truly admire these photographers.

Dove Croton does well in cultivation. The flowers are tiny, either male or female, and blooming may occur throughout the year. (PDST p 217) Small butterflies, skippers and hairstreaks, love them.

In the wild, *Croton humilis* occurs throughout deep south Texas, but sporadically, and infrequent. Until 2016, this editor was not aware of the great attraction this plant holds for nectaring butterflies. It is a hostplant for the Tropical Leafwing butterfly. An excellent addition to the winter garden.

Left to Right, top to bottom.

Black Hairstreak,
Mike A Rickard at National Butterfly Center, Mission.

Pearlygrey Hairstreak,
Dan & Honeylet Jones photo:

Purple-Wash Skipper,
Dan & Honeylet Jones photo.

Silver-Banded Hairstreak,
Javi Gonzalez photo.

Red-Crescent Scrub-Hairstreak and a red-eyed fly,
photo by Simon Kiacz.

Gray Hairstreak and smaller Mallow Scrub-hairstreak,
photo by Simon Kiacz.
More Winter Bloomers—Food for the Nectarers and Pollinators.

Dan & Honeylet Jones captured this fresh Queen nectaring on a wild aster, PDST p127 (previously *Aster Subulatus*) commonly found in fields.

Mike A Rickard found these Hairstreak butterflies on Chomonque, found in Hidalgo and Starr counties. (*Gochnatia hypoleuca*, PDST p101.) This is one of our best winter-blooming shrubs, with excellent nectar. Chomonque leaves are dark, pointed and glossy with beautifully -contrasting white undersides. Chomonque habitat is rapidly decreas-

Javi Gonzalez found this Butterfly Wolf Wasp, probably on *Lantana velutina*, Velvet Lantana, PDST p417. Several species of Lantana continued blooming into winter.

Frostweed, *Verbesina microptera*, PDST p134-5. Strophius Hairstreak photo by Mike A Rickard

Coma blooms and nectarers were also widely photographed this winter. Telea Hairstreak on Coma: *Sideroxylon celastrinum*, PDST p382, Troy Zurovec photo. Coma forms vast, thorny, shiny-leaved colonies which bear tasty black sticky fruits beloved by birds, especially orioles.
**Buttonbush: Rare in the Wild.**

Willow Leaf Buttonbush, Mexican Buttonbush. _Cephalanthus salicifolius_. PDST p 369.

Rarely-seen in the wild, this wonderful shrub is found mainly in wet soils near the Rio Grande in Cameron and Hidalgo counties. It grows along the water’s edge at Anzalduas State Park, usually blooming spring thru summer.

Javi Gonzalez captured these wonderful images of blooming Buttonbush at Edinburg Scenic Wetlands. **Upper Left** is a Guava Skipper. In the **lower left** image, a Julia Longwing appears to be menacing a Ruddy Daggerwing.

Edinburg Scenic Wetlands provides a wonderful place to see the wide range of wildlife attracted to ponds and streams such as this Halloween Pennant dragonfly, **below**, also photographed by Javi.

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**A Winter “Valley” Resident: Ruby-Crowned Kinglet. What is it eating?**

In migration and winter, the Ruby-Crowned Kinglet often flits about low in woods and thickets, flicking its wings nervously as it approaches the observer. When it is truly excited (by a potential mate, rival, or predator), the male may erect his ruby-red crown feathers, hidden at other times.

It forages actively at all levels, from treetops to low brush, examining foliage, twigs, and major limbs for foods. Often hovers while taking items from foliage, and sometimes flies out to catch insects in mid-air. At all seasons, the diet is primarily small insects, the birds concentrating on whatever is most readily available; includes many small beetles, flies, leafhoppers, true bugs, caterpillars, and many others. Also eats spiders and pseudoscorpions; diet includes eggs of insects and spiders. In winter, also eats some berries and seeds. Sometimes takes oozing sap or visits flowers, possibly for nectar.

3.5-4.3 in. long. (_Regulus calendula_)

This brilliant photo of an excited male was captured by Dan & Honeylet Jones at the Mercedes Cemetery.
Above left: Rose-Bellied Lizard, *Sceloporus variabilis*, captured by Javi Gonzalez at Santa Ana NWR. Forages for large insects among the leaf litter, a very good reason for leaving leaf litter in places this harmless lizard might visit. Extreme S TX.

Above right: Turk’s Cap White-Skipper on Common Velvet Bur, *Priva lappulacea*, PDST p 419. Photo by Mike A Rickard. This small plant disappears in dry weather and reappears in cool, wet seasons. The tiny fruit (bur) is covered by sticky hairs.


More Animal Activity

John Brush photos:
Left: Forb’s Silkmoth Caterpillar on hostplant Colima, Zanthoxylum fagara, PDST p 377.

**Sponsors (Native Plant Nurseries)**

**Heep's LRGV Native Plant Nursery**
Owned and operated by Mike and Claire Heep
We grow plants suited to landscaping and revegetation in south Texas.
1714 S. Palm Court Drive, Harlingen, TX 78552
(956) 457-6834 <heep0311@yahoo.com>
[www.heepsnursery.com]

**LRGV Native Plant Sources**
See also our Sponsors on right

**Perez Ranch Nursery**
(Betty Perez)
12 miles north of La Joya, TX
(956) 580-8915
<PerezRanchNatives@gmail.com>

Please be aware that the following vendors may also sell non-natives.

**NABA Butterfly Park**
Old Military Hwy/3333 Butterfly Pk Dr
Mission, TX 78572
office (956) 583-5400
Marianna Trevino Wright, Exec.Dir.
cell 956-648-7117
<marianna@nationalbutterflycenter.org>
[http://www.nationalbutterflycenter.org]

**Rancho Lomitas Nursery**
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P.O. Box 442
Rio Grande City, TX 78582
(956) 486-2576 *By appt. only

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701 E. Bus. Hwy. 83
McAllen, TX 78501
(956) 682-9411

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956-342-5979; <gddl@att.net>
7500 N 21st St; McAllen, TX 78504
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**Landscapers using Natives:**

Landscaping, Etc. Inc.
**Noel Villarreal**
125 N. Tower Rd, Edinburg
956-874-4267
956-316-2599

Seaside Goldenrod continued to bloom into winter. Javi Gonzalez photographed this Cassius Blue at Edinburg Scenic Wetlands on Seaside Goldenrod: *Solidago sempervirens*, PDST p 125.

**Come visit the VNC:**
301 S. Border Ave.
Weslaco, TX 78596
(956) 969-2475
info@valleynaturecenter.org
www.valleynaturecenter.org

**Valley Nature Center**
-6 acre Nature Park & Trails -Book & Gift Shop-
-Native Plant Nursery-Meeting Room-
-Environmental Education and Exhibit Hall-

**Native Plants for Sale**

Watch Birds & Butterflies

NPP Board & General Meetings held at Valley Nature Center
(see ABOVE)
(Fourth Tuesday each month)

**Board Meetings 6:30pm — Speaker 7:30pm.**
The Native Plant Project (NPP) has no paid staff or facilities. NPP is supported entirely by memberships and contributions. Anyone interested in native plants is invited to join. Members receive 8 issues of The Sabal newsletter per year in which they are informed of all project activities and meetings.

Meetings are held at:
Valley Nature Center, 301 S. Border, Weslaco, TX.

Native Plant Project Membership Application

__Regular $20/yr.  __Contributing $45/yr  
__Life $250 one time fee/person  
Other donation: __________________________

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Please mail this form with dues check payable to:
Native Plant Project, POB 2742, San Juan, TX 78589-7742

FROM: NPP; POB 2742; San Juan, TX 78589

TO:
Dues expiring?

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by biologist and naturalist Javier de León, Park Superintendent
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In this issue:
Poetry by Drew Bennie.
What are animals doing/eating this winter?
Chris Durden commented: “I find 62 degrees F is the magic temperature threshold for normal butterflies.” Moderate temperatures during much of December made creature photography, especially butterflies, amazing this year.

Above: Carolina Mantis eating a Skipper butterfly. 
Crucita, Blue Mistflower, Chromolaena odorata, PDST p 91. 
Crucita continued to bear sparse blooms during early winter, attracting insectivores, nectarers and pollinators. 
Photo by Troy Zurovec.