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

NPP meeting topic/speaker:

“Wildflowers of El Mesteño”
—by Camille (Smith) Rich
Tues., March 26th, at 7:30pm

Camille inherited El Mesteño Ranch from her father
in 2008. Since that time, she has created a watering
hole for wildlife support. In protecting the native
habitat, she has observed the many wildflowers she
will show us. They are the spring flowers which
naturally occur on the South Texas Sand Sheet.
Camille will explore the many benefits these
beauties bestow upon us besides their great looks.
Camille is a frequent contributor to local wildlife
groups on Facebook. She is a Master Naturalist.
The meeting is at: Valley Nature Center,
301 S Border, (Gibson Park), Weslaco. 956-969-2475.

Photo above: Taken by Camille Rich at her ranch.
Yellow-Flowered Alicoche (Papillosus), PDST 164,
Echinocereus papillosus var. angusticeps.

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 Sabal, March 2019, Vol. 36 No. 3
www.NativePlantProject.org

Spring in Deep South Texas — by Christina Mild

Spring around here can be especially confusing. We’re pretty much adapted to summer’s hot, hotter and hottest weather. Spring can come and go in the course of one day: cool and wet to hot, windy and dry. This Sabal issue will focus on some of the blooms of cool wet days, as well as those which bear up in windy dry heat.

It always seems to warm up to T-shirt weather during Brownsville’s Charro Days. A few weeks later, spring breakers on South Padre Island seem to be hit with cold and drizzle. When these “northers” hit, birders celebrate colorful migrating warblers on their way back north from Central and South America.

Spring is exciting, even if it only lasts for a day or two.

Pinky-Purple-Blooming Sprawling Verbenaceae.
In this area, we have three sprawling members of the Verbena Family which bear clusters of pinkish-purple blooms. (PDST 413-414)
Without detailed views of the leaves and growth habit, it is hard to distinguish them. All are excellent nectar plants.
Craig Lipski observed and photographed a wide assortment of butterflies nectaring on such clustered blooms at NABA’s Butterfly Park in late February: Nysa Roadside-skipper, Sleepy Orange, Monarch, Black & Pipevine Swallowtails, Double-dotted Skipper, Southern Broken-Dash, Sachem and the American Lady shown in the photo on the right.
Shape and size of leaves help to differentiate similar species of “Verbena”: (These three species, formerly “Verbena,” are now “Glandularia.”)
The switch to Glandularia was made on the basis of genetic studies. These have been commonly known as “Mock Vervains.”
Ken King notes that most upright species have remained as Verbena; those with sprawling growth habit such as these are now Glandularia.

Glandularia polyantha, PDST 414.
Photographed by Al Richardson, NABA, 2/29/2017.
Stems are sprawling, as seen in this cropped photo of a large colony.
Leaves are up to 3/4” long, fan-like, ovate to triangular with rounded lobes.
Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy counties.
(Note white bloom centers.)

Alfombrilla
Glandularia delticola, PDST 413.
Photographed by Al Richardson, near Rio Hondo, 3/24/2012.
Leaves up to 2 3/8” long, pointed lobes.
Occurs in Cameron County.

Dakota Vervain, Glandularia bipinnatifida, PDST 413.
Mild photo, Harlingen, TX.
Unlike species restricted to smaller areas, the natural range of Dakota Vervain extends from the United States south to Nicaragua. It occurs in a wide variety of soil types and weather. Blooms range from bright pinks through a range toward darker purple. Leaves are highly dissected: divided and re-divided, i.e. bipinnatifida. Blooms can appear in any season when moisture is available.

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Willacy County Sands.
Driving north on Hwy. 77 into Willacy county, one notices a distinct change in the number and variety of wildflowers. For many years, NPP members have travelled to a favorite spot north of Raymondville to examine the wildflowers closely. Elisa Velador recently photographed some beautiful specimens from the family Commelinaceae in Willacy county. Two of her photos appear below.

Commelinaceae. The Spiderwort family. Monocots. Occurring primarily in tropical regions. These are herbaceous plants, somewhat succulent, with bladelike leaves having parallel venation.

Four species are represented in Plants of Deep South Texas, pages 29-31.

Stemless Spiderwort. PDST 31.
*Tradescantia subcaulis.*
Note the three bluntly-pointed petals.
Blooms emerge from the center.
Succulent perennial with very short stems.
The entire plant grows close to the soil.
Leaves are up to about 7” long.
Endemic to the sandy soils of Texas.
Hidalgo and Willacy counties.

Note the variation in bloom color captured so well by Elisa Velador.

Common Commelinaceae: Most of us are more familiar with these species.

(lefth) Widow’s Tears, *Commelina erecta (elegans),* PDST 30. This often becomes a garden pest, but is easily mown down. Note the two rounded petals and the elegant floral parts seen in profile. Petals “melt” when touched or cut for a bouquet. Stems are long, often leaning. (*Commelina erecta, elegans* and *diffusa* are very hard to differentiate.)

(right) Southern Coastal Roseling.
*Callisia micrantha (formerly Tradescantia sp.)* This tiny herbaceous plant grows very well in pots and watered gardens. Blooms 1/4”.
By some, it is considered a pest. For those who are grateful to any native which will grow, this is a pretty choice to add to your growing space. Reddish leaves probably indicate stress; they are typically a lovely lime green.
Caught in Action. Photos of larvae and adult butterflies on their hostplants.
When NPP’s handbook on “Butterfly Gardening” was in the creation phase, the search was on for photos of butterflies and their host plants. In many cases, the only photos of the butterflies in question illustrated their use of a nectar plant, rather than the host(s). Recently, several Facebook-posted photos captured the “gold:” butterflies and larvae on their very own host plant. Here are a few of those gems.

Winged Sea Purslane. *Sesuvium verrucosum (sessile)*. PDST 56.
Rick Snider captured this Western Pygmy Blue nectaring on the same species which serves as hostplant.
This succulent is found in the southwestern quadrant of the United States, Mexico, and parts of South America. It grows in many types of saline and alkaline habitat types on the coast and inland, including salt marshes and other saline wetlands, alkali flats, and drying desert washes. It is a perennial herb. Aizoaceae.

“Purslane” is an example of a common name which is used for plants from completely different families. PDST 55-57 shows examples from the family Aizoaceae. PDST 358-359 includes those from the family Portulacaceae. All of these are succulents, a term which describes the fleshy nature of plant parts.

Native to the state of Texas in the U.S. and the states of Coahuila, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas in northern Mexico. Widely cultivated and sold as a water-efficient ornamental.
Bloom color is typically purple, but may be white.
Craig Lipski captured this Theona Checkerspot caterpillar (*Chlosyne theona*) eating leaves of the host plant, Cenizo.
(right) Adult Theona Checkerspot.
Photo by Barry Nall.
[www.leps.thenalls.net]

Colima, *Zanthoxylum fagara*, PDST 377. (left)
Dan & Honeylet Jones have made their Progreso Lakes yard into a haven for wild flora and fauna.
They captured this Giant Swallowtail ovipositing on a hostplant: Colima, a member of the Rutaceae (Citrus) family. When one allocates space for this curve-prickled hazard, it is especially wonderful to see that it is used by wildlife.
The well-armed nature of this shrub makes it a great nesting and resting spot for critters.
The leaves have a marvelous citrusy scent; they also have curved spines along the rachis.
Careful where you rub!
Wet Depressions. In heavy clay soils, small depressions (often created by vehicles) may hold a surprising variety of wildflowers, especially those with tiny blooms. Of course, these wet spots are ephemeral. As soon as temperatures and/or wind increase, evaporation changes the nature of those places to hard, dry and compact. Here are two of the tiny blooming things which observers have noticed this spring. Scrophulariaceae family.

**Prostrate Water Hyssop**, (left and right) *Mecardonia procumbens*, PDST 388. Sara Neuder found a nice colony of this tiny plant along the frontage hills of Ramsey Park in Harlingen. It is generally found in wet places, but can survive dry areas. Note the notched leaves. Blooms are typically 1/4”.

(From Wikipedia: Annual or perennial herb native to tropical and subtropical regions of the Americas. It has become widely spread in warmer regions worldwide, and is now naturalized on all continents except Antarctica, in addition to most islands with suitable climates.)

Notice the similarity of leaves above and below (especially in photos on the right). Found in similar locales, these plants may be confused if blooms are absent. *Stemodia* leaves are slightly grey-green.

**Schott’s Twintip**, *Stemodia shottii*, PDST 389. Uncommon in this area and restricted in the U.S. Also in Zapata and Val Verde counties. Erect or leaning. Observed in bloom by Matt Kauffman. Blooms are less than 1/2” long.

Similar and related to: Wooly Stemodia, *Stemodia lanata*.

**Yearlong Standouts.**

Fortunately, some plants produce blooms almost year-round.

**Malva Loca**, *Malvastrum americanum*, PDST 312. (Map inset from “Atlas of the Vascular Plants of Texas,” Vol. 1, by B. L. Turner, et. al. shows the distribution.) Very common and hardy in deep south Texas, *Malvastrum americanum* occurs in very few places in the U.S. The range extends southward into Mexico and Central America and the species also occurs in Florida.

These small yellow blooms are open around sundown, closed for most of the day. They’re surrounded by hairy bracts, often appearing as an elongated, brown fuzzy spike.

A good series of photos is available on iNaturalist. You will probably find this species along sunny, even compacted, trailsides and roads.

(right) Rick Snider captured a Vesta Crescent (*Phyciodes vesta*) nectaring on an open bloom; both are capturing the light of sundown.
Color Variations. Several photographers have noticed unusual color variations recently. Red, orange and yellow occur in a spectrum which can vary between those shades due to fading, soil minerals, and genetics. Blooms which occur in blue can vary in shades which fade towards white. Red Prickly Poppies vary in shades from white through pinkish to deep red-maroon.

Left: Patty Raney provided this photo of a yellow-fruited tasajillo (usually red) found on the Martin Refuge near Edinburg. Desert Christmas Cactus, Tasajillo, Opuntia leptocaulis. PDST 171. Blooming occurs in spring. Fruits are usually available through the winter.

Right: Matt Kauffman spotted this white-blooming Phacelia patuliflora, PDST 282. South Texas Sand Scorpionweed. These blooms are more typically blue/purple with white centers. Blooms typically occur in spring. Hydrophyllaceae.

Thank Goodness for Tall Resilient Thistle! Thistles have gotten a very bad name in recent years, as a number of imported exotic pest species have been introduced to the U.S. Texas Thistle, Cirsium texanum, PDST 92, is native. It is invaluable to wildlife. Asteraceae.

We in deep south Texas are not plagued, to my knowledge, with exotic thistles. Texas Thistle is blooming now along roadsides. The blooms attract a wide variety of pollinators, including monarchs, swallowtails and other butterflies. When blooms produce mature seeds, those are eaten by a variety of small birds. The fluff attached to those seeds is used by birds to line their nests. Unlike shorter wildflowers, Texas Thistles can compete favorably with the exotic tall grasses which plague us here, like buffle and guinea grass.

Texas Thistle is a marvelous addition to any wildflower garden. Seeds are mature when they turn black. Use forceps to handle the prickly dry stems, cut off mature seed-heads, separate the dry seeds from all the fluff and store seeds in a dry place.
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>

These vendors may sell exotics:

National Butterfly Center
Old Military Hwy/3333 Butterfly Pk Dr
Mission, TX 78572
office 956-583-5400x754 Max Munoz
<max@nationalbutterflycenter.org>
[http://www.nationalbutterflycenter.org]

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

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

M&G Double D Native Plants & Seeds of South Texas, (Gail Dantzker)
956-342-5979; <gdld@att.net>
7500 N 21st St; McAllen, TX 78504
[mandgdoubled.com]
Grown at The Woods, Willacy Cty., TX.

Landscapers using Natives:
Landscaping, Etc. Inc.
Noel Villarreal
125 N. Tower Rd, Edinburg
956-874-4267, 956-316-2599

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) 457-8834 <heep0311@yahoo.com>
[www.heepsnursery.com]

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

A Secret Garden in the Heart of the Rio Grande Valley

NPP Board & General Meetings are held at Valley Nature Center
(4th Tues. each month, except thru summer)

Brd Mtgs 6:30pm — Speaker 7:30pm
4/23/2019, 5/28/2019,
* 9/24/2019, 10/22/2019, 11/26/2019 *
(*No meetings during summer or in December.)

Photo above: Christina Mild and Barbara Peet observed this blooming and fruiting specimen in Harlingen’s Ramsay Nature Park.
Desert Olive, Panalero, Elbowbush, PDST 333, Forestiera angustistolia, family Oleaceae.
Fruits form on female plants only. Some years bring forth bountiful amounts of fruit in wild places. These 1/4” black fruits taste just awful. Fruits and leaves are consumed by wildlife. Attractive, thorn-less shrub with strong roots.
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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I'm choosing the "green option!"
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Email address: ________________________________

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

NPP meeting/speaker:
The Native Plant Project will present:

"Wildflowers of El Mesteño"
—by Camille (Smith) Rich

Tues., March 26th, at 7:30pm

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301 S Border, (in Gibson Park), Weslaco. 956-969-2475.
We hope to see you there!
Feel free to bring a native plant for identification.
Native Plants are available for a donation!!

In this issue:
Spring in Deep South Texas:

Photo below: Joseph Connors captured this Hoverfly on blooms of Texas Persimmon (Chapote, Diospyros texana, PDST 205). Connors relates: “These Texas Persimmon flowers were popular with a bunch of different pollinators. This ... Hoverfly (is) in the family Syrphidae, Copestylum tamaulipanum ... the name means ‘from Tamaulipas.’”

Now is a good time to look for blooming shrubs and trees and the pollinators which visit. Many blooms smell terrific!