



The Sabal

April 2026
Volume 42, number 4

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Plant species page #s in the Sabal refer to:
"Plants of Deep South Texas" by A.Richardson & K.King (PDST).

Plants of Deep South Texas has been reprinted (without revisions).

Ask your favorite bookstore or nature center to restock it!

It appears to be available at this time on Amazon.

It is also available as an ebook for Kindle.

Editor: Christina Mild
<mild.christina@gmail.com
Submission of relevant articles and/or
photos are welcomed.

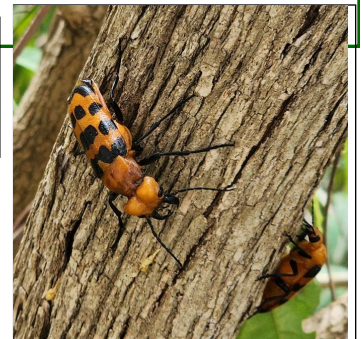
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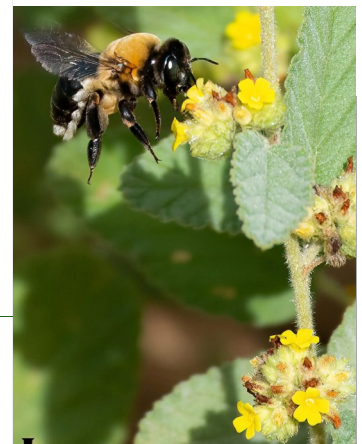


Photos by Camille M. Rich:

Above: Nature story in the backyard March 10th:

Big-eared blister beetle
Cissites auriculata --- hanging out near known, documented Carpenter Bee nests in dead Esperanza (*Tecoma stans*) wood.

Below: Female *Mesoxaea texana* bee on Hierba del Soldado. See p 4.



NPP meeting topic/speaker: Tues., April 28th, at 7 pm

"A Naturalist's Mission"

presented by — Camille M. Rich

Camille M. Rich will focus her presentation on: tracking rare native bee species, photographing night skies, and recording nature stories on the red-sand portion of the South Texas Sand Sheet.

Ms. Rich is the proud owner and steward of a small piece of endangered Tamaulipan thorn scrub located in the South Texas Sand Sheet in Northwestern Hidalgo County, Texas. One of her passions includes documenting the species which visit a watering hole that she installed in 2008 for the sole purpose of supporting the wildlife on her property.

More recently, she has taken up astrophotography---a hobby which she had on the back burner for several years.

In addition to actively pursuing these passions, she continues to document and record sightings and observational data on two rare native bee species---the *Mesoxaea texana* and the *Protoxaea gloriosa*--that call the sandy soils of El Mesteño Ranch® home.

Ms. Rich is a retired public educator with thirty years of experience and completed the Texas Master Naturalist training in 2013. Her passion for the enjoyment and preservation of wildlife is a driving force in her daily life. One of her greatest joys is getting to share her South Texas Sand Sheet nature stories and experiences with others.

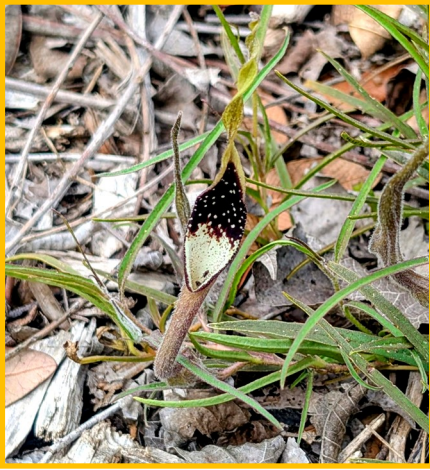
The program will take place at:

Valley Nature Center, 301 South Border St. in Weslaco, behind Gibson Park.
The public is invited, and admission is free.

For more information about the Native Plant Project,

visit <https://nativeplantproject.com>
or follow us on Instagram @plantsofdeepsouthtx.

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



Family: Aristolochiaceae (Dutchman’s Pipe)

Swan Flower

Aristolochia erecta (*A. longiflora*). PDST 73.

Kristy Miner Baker has Swan Flower growing in her yard, and these are her photos from early April.

In the wild, Swan Flower is easy to overlook and not abundant. This editor has only found it by following the Pipevine Swallowtail butterfly to see where it was laying eggs: on the leaves of Swan Flower.

Aristolochia erecta occurs most often in sandy soils. Roots are fleshy. Leaves resemble grass. (These photos have been enhanced to make the plant easier to see. In nature, the color is not so lime green.) Leaves and stems are visible only during the active growing season (spring—fall).

Blooms (photo top left) have the shape of a long flared pipe, topped with speckled red, thought to resemble rot and attract fly pollinators.

Seed capsules (2nd photo) split into 5 sections (bottom photos), each containing many stacked flat, triangular seeds.

Seeds photographed on Kristy’s hand give some idea of the small size.

Battus philenor, the Pipevine Swallowtail butterfly, lays eggs on *Aristolochia* species. The larvae are plump, with many projections, and range in color from red/orange to black/purple. They may remind you of toxic gummy worms.



Berry Nall photo.



C. Mild photo



Open seed capsule.
Triangular



Check out Joey Santore’s video on this plant at:
<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1AbZjDNp62/>

White Bloom Spikes.

Several natives put forth spikes of blooms, and here are three of those. Each is excellent for butterfly nectar. Most photos are by Kristy Miner Baker from her yard.



Texas Kidneywood, *Eysenhardtia texana*. PDST 262.

This tall, airy shrub is primarily found in sandy regions of Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr counties.

It is a perennial, with lovely-smelling foliage. Note the compound leaves with 15-47 leaflets.

This is a legume, producing small beanpods. Birds, especially Black crested titmice, eat the seeds.

Butterflies adore this shrub; it is one of our best butterfly nectar plants. Closely-related species produce yellow water when the wood is soaked, thus, “kidney” wood.

Host plant to the Southern Dogface butterfly.



Whitebrush, BeeBrush, *Aloysia gratissima*. PDST 411. Blooms spring—fall and found throughout deep south Texas.

Note that leaf margins in this photo are toothed: this is variety *shulzae*.

You will also find specimens with “entire” leaf margins, without notches or cuts. That is variety *gratissima*.

Whitebrush spreads easily in disturbed areas.

It can be toxic to livestock.

Verbena family.

Pixie photo by C. Mild.

Bloom spike closeup by Kristy Miner Baker.



Negrito, Berlandier's Fiddlewood, *Citharexylum berlandieri*. PDST 412. Common species on clay dunes near the coast.

Wonderful specimens grow along the nature trails at Laguna Vista, a marvelous place to visit. (Use repellent: chiggers are there.)

Blooming occurs primarily from spring—summer, but with regular watering, blooming can be prolonged. This shrub often has blooms and fruits simultaneously, which is a gorgeous sight.

Fruits ripen from orange to purple/black and are tasty when ripe. Cuttings are great decor from Halloween through Christmas.

Seeds resemble a cloven hoof. Easily propagated from seed or cuttings.

Mexican Bluewing butterflies suck juice from the ripe fruits, inserting their proboscis at the base where the fruit is attached.

The foliage is sometimes ugly from pathogen-attack. However, any ugliness can be trimmed back and the shrub will recover.

Fast-growing, thornless, and excellent for wildlife.

Stress from heat, sun, drought or cold produces orange tinted foliage.

Plants With Fuzzy Parts.

You may be familiar with some of these. Others are not so noticeable, or very small, or they occur in few places. Each of these was blooming in Kristy Miner Baker's yard this spring. These are her photos.

Fuzz can be helpful in many ways, reflecting light, absorbing dew, and making leaves less palatable for most animals (think of chomping on flannel or having cat hair in your sandwich). Quite a few nature plants are hirsute, i.e., fuzzy.



Family: Solanaceae (Potato, Tomato, Nightshade)

Potato Tree, *Solanum elaeagnifolium*, PDST 401.

These leaves feel like flannel and they are very stinky. Historically, they were used to wash dishes. When the plants are covered by Arroyo Colorado floodwater, they emerge covered with sediment.

The fruits are adored by birds and other critters. For birders, this species may attract the highest number and variety of feathered friends.

It is fast-growing: thus limbs break easily.

Each plant sends out lateral root-sprouts, from which new individuals pop up. When digging these upstarts, look for lateral roots to dig out.

Certain birds, including chachalaca, eat these incredibly fuzzy, smelly leaves.

Such birds are called folivores, and these include the Hoatzin.



Family: Buddlejaceae (Loganiaceae)

Rio Grande Butterfly Bush, Tepozan, *Buddleja sessiliflora*, PDST 159.

Naturally occurring near the banks of the Rio Grande in Cameron and Hidalgo counties, this plant is threatened by Border Patrol activities.

It does well in cultivation and provides a nice contrast to other shades of green foliage. For best growth and flowering (spring—summer), watering is required.

Other species in this genus attract many butterflies; this species attracts mostly flies.

The blooms are aromatic, but not especially pleasant.



Family: Sterculiaceae (*related to Ayenia, Hermannia and Melochia*)

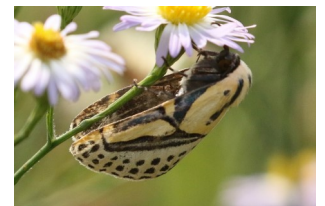
Hierba del Soldado (Soldier Plant), *Waltheria indica*. PDST 406

Hostplant for the Hieroglyphic Moth, *Diphthera festiva*.

Photo below by Dan Jones.

Waltheria occurs throughout deep south Texas and blooms year-round.

It naturally occurs in sandy and caliche soils, but seems to do well in cultivation.



Family: Violaceae (Violet: possibly the only locally-native member of this family)

Nodding Green Violet, *Hybanthus verticillatus* var. *platyphyllus*. PDST 422.

This low-growing herb often goes unseen in waste places throughout Texas.

It may bloom throughout the year. Shades of violet on the blooms may remind you of the name and family.

(Without magnification, you probably would not suspect this hairiness.)

This is a host plant for the Variegated Fritillary, *Euptoieta claudia*. Photo by Berry Nall.



Yellow Blooms Quiz: Most of these were blooming in Kristy Miner Baker's yard this spring. See if you can match them to their ID. Some are probably familiar; some may not be. Most photos are by Kristy Miner Baker from her yard.



Desert Yaupon, *Schaefferia cuneifolia*. PDST 179. (highly-enlarged photo) E
Shrubs up to 6' tall, usually shorter. Distribution throughout deep south Texas. Blooms spring—summer.
Ripe fruits are orange to red, 3/16". Male and female flowers on separate plants.

Square Bed Primrose, Yellow Sundrops. *Oenothera serrulatus* (*Calylophus serrulatus*). PDST 335. A
12" tall or less. Sometimes woody basally. Cameron & Willacy counties, abundant in the sand, especially at the coast.
(Petals in this photo may not be fully open. Four petals, ovary inferior.)

Damiana, Hierba del Venado (Herb of the Deer). *Turnera diffusa* var. *aphrodisiaca*. PDST 407. F
Rare in Cameron and Hidalgo counties. Primarily in Starr county on gravelly or caliche slopes or hilltops.
Blooming may occur in all seasons. Pleasantly aromatic. May grow to 6' tall, usually shorter.
Host plant for the Mexican Fritillary.

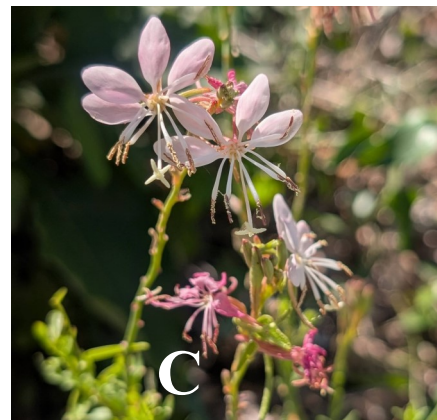
Seaside Goldenrod. *Solidago sempervirens*. PDST 125. (C. Mild photo) D
Blooming occurs summer thru fall. Perennials to 6' tall, usually shorter. Excellent addition to a butterfly garden.
Cameron and Willacy county distribution.

Rio Grande Ayenia, Texas Ayenia. *Ayenia limitaris*. PDST 403. (highly-enlarged photo) C
Occurs on sandy loam. Endangered due to invasive grasses and in the Arroyo Colorado brush due to *Kalanchoe* sp.
Unusual blooms and bristly five-part fruiting capsules distinguish this native. Older stems are maroon in color.
Leaves resemble mallows. Grows well in cultivation.

Partridge Pea, *Chaemaecrista fasciculata*. PDST 233. B
Annuals up to 50" tall with reddish stems, usually shorter and spread out. Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy counties.
Blooms spring—fall. Generally found in sandy soils near the coast. Host for Cloudless Sulphur and Little Yellow.

Red-spectrum Blooms Quiz: Most of these were blooming red/pink/coral in Kristy Miner Baker's yard this spring. See if you can match them to their ID. Some are confined to narrow habitats, others are widespread.

Most are Kristy Miner Baker photos.



C. Sweet Gaura, *Gaura drummondii*. PDST 336.

These are blooming profusely along many roadsides just now. They may bloom from spring—fall. It is difficult to transplant these, as they have profuse, wiry roots and generally grow in very packed earth. Colonies spread by underground rhizomes.

A. Red Clammy Weed, Cat Whiskers, *Polanisia dodecandra* subsp. *riograndensis*. PDST 176.

Annuals to 24" tall. Sticky and smelly, but great butterfly attraction. Found throughout deep south Texas. Wild-collected seed is fairly easy to establish with direct sowing. Long, protruding stamens lend the name Cat Whiskers.

F. Beach Palafoxia. *Palafoxia texana* subsp. *ambigua*. PDST 115.

These are most easily found on Padre Island, where it is easy to collect seed, which becomes delightfully stiff. The seeds are eaten by Lesser Goldfinches. Excellent butterfly nectar may be available spring—fall. Annual.

B. Purple Bean. *Macroptilium atropurpureum*. PDST 266. Photo by Jann Miller.

Perennial twining vine, easily grown in pots. Jann Miller has been growing this vine for many years. It seems to bloom quite often when watered. Jann's seeds are often available at our meetings, and we have plants available sometimes. Distribution is mainly along the coast.

D. Scarlet Spiderling. *Boerhavia coccinea*. PDST 328.

A common roadside weed, possibly easy to rescue and transplant. The plant is perennial with a thickened taproot. It becomes especially evident in the hottest parts of the year, when it may be the only bit of color along the road.

E. Wooly Pyramid Bush. *Melochia tomentosa*. PDST 405.

One of our best butterfly-nectar shrubs. Pyramid-shaped seed capsules give the plant its name. Blooming occurs spring—fall. Distribution is Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr counties. The pale green leaves provide wonderful contrast in the garden. Good drainage is recommended.

Sponsors (Native Plant Nurseries)

LRGV Native Plant Sources

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>
Heep's Nursery is on Facebook



Perez Ranch Nursery
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(956) 587-2149

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La Floresta Native Nursery

David Laughlin
956-410-9034;
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Harlingen, TX 78550
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Nurseries/Landscaper selling Natives & Exotics:

Oleander Nursery (Seth & Candi Welliver)

Follow their Facebook page for updates!
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<Oleandernursery@gmail.com>

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National Butterfly Center

Old Military Hwy/3333 Butterfly Pk Dr.
Mission, TX 78572

[http://www.nationalbutterflycenter.org]

Rancho Lomitas Nursery (Benito Trevino)

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

Landscaping, Etc. Inc., **Noel Villarreal**

125 N. Tower Rd, Edinburg;
956-874-4267, 956-316-2599

NPP Board & General Meetings
are held at Valley Nature Center

(4th Tues. each month,
except December & thru summer)

Brd Mtgs 6 pm — Speaker 7 pm

Upcoming meetings: 2026:
May 26. Resuming in September.



Brownsville Birding Festival
was held on April 11-12, 2026. The Native Plant Project booth provided seeds and literature at no cost. There was considerable interest: we ran out of materials to give away.

Volunteers included: Christina Mild, Lizz Romero, Bert Wessling, Ken King, Drew Bennie, Kathy Sheldon, Noelle Olarte (right) and Josue Ayala.



NPP hopes to participate in this festival again next spring. Please let any board member know if you'd like to help with our booth.

Thank you to Josue Ayala (below) for these photos.



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

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

NEW: Student \$5/yr. (high school or college)
Regular \$20/yr. Contributing \$45/yr
Life \$250 one time fee/person
“Awards” fund donation: _____

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Name _____

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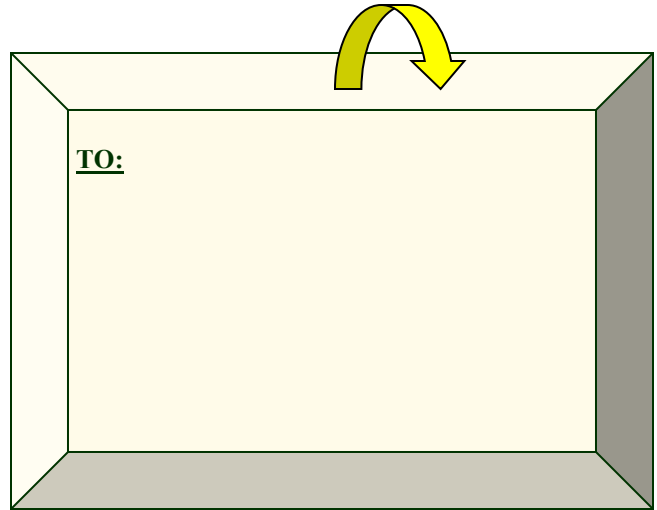
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I'm choosing the “green option!” **Send my SABAL via .pdf file to:**

Email: _____

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

Are your dues current? Membership year is Jan.-Dec.



NPP meeting/speaker:
Tues., April 28th, at 7 pm

“A Naturalists’s Mission”
presented by — Camille M. Rich

Camille will focus on: tracking rare native bee species, photographing night skies, and recording nature stories on the red-sand portion of the South Texas Sand Sheet.

The meeting is held at **Valley Nature Center**,
301 S Border, (in Gibson Park), Weslaco.
956-969-2475

Feel free to bring a native plant for I.D.
Native Plants are available for a donation.
(Please be generous!)

We encourage donations of plant pots, seeds,
and cuttings of native plants.



Above: Swallowflower. *Aristolochia erecta*. Fresh blooms.



Leaves resemble grass; but veins are not parallel.
Host for the Pipevine Swallowtail.
Pipevine Swallowtail larvae are plump, with projections and bumps. Coloration ranges from red/orange to purple/black. Larvae absorb toxins from the Pipevine.
C. Mild photos.

See article p 2.

Plant Species Featured in this issue: *Aloysia gratissima, Aristolochia erecta, Ayenia limitaris, Boerhavia coccinea, Buddleja sessiliflora, Chaemaecrista fasciculata, Citharexylum berlandieri, Eysenhardtia texana, Gaura drummondii, Macroptilium atropurpureum, Melochia tomentosa, Oenothera serrulatus, Polanisia dodecandra subsp. riograndensis, Schaefferia cuneifolia, Solanum erianthum, Solidago sempervirens, Turnera diffusa var. aphrodisiaca, Waltheria indica.*