



The Sabal

September 2015

Volume 32, number 5

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Sept. 2015 Mtg., Native Plant Project:

Tues., Sept. 22nd, 2015: at 7:30pm

The Native Plant Project will present:

"The Plants of Estero and the Wildlife They Support."
by John Yochum

John moved to Harlingen from Ohio nine years ago. He had previously visited the Valley frequently, mostly coming to see his brother on his birthdays. He has been a Park Ranger these nine years, first at Bentsen State Park in Mission, and now at Estero Llano Grande State Park in Weslaco. John leads many tours at Estero. (Details on p4.)

He loves everything about the Valley (butterflies, dragonflies, its native and non-native plants, mammals, beetles, bugs, etc.) but especially those thirty birds termed Valley Specialties!

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



Above: Diana Miller's photo of an Ani eating a leaf-footed bug.

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>

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Ecology and Deep South Texas

—by Christina Mild

One of the plants I've been concerned about is *Yucca treculeana*, PDST p20. While I see brilliant and abundant bloomstalks throughout the Valley, I rarely see mature seedpods. Instead, there are dried and shriveled stalks without any seed.

Dr. Andrew McDonald of UTRGV has seen the same phenomenon and sent his students out to do a bit of study on the problem.

I had assumed the cause was an absence of the Yucca Moth, which fertilizes Yucca blooms, in an intricate symbiotic relationship described in PDST. Another term for this is "specialized mutualism." The loss of this relationship has a domino effect. In the case of the Yucca, which provides abundant food in the blooms and immature seedpods, as well as excellent nesting habitat, this domino effect is fairly easy to imagine. As Dr. McDonald notes, "you get the point if you mess with this species!"

My assumption has been that insecticides may have wiped out populations of this essential moth. Dr. McDonald reminds me that there are probably many factors involved, with yet another possibility an introduced insect predator of the Yucca Moth. His students actually found that the moth is still present.

On another note, as a graduate student in plant physiology, I learned that the bloom cycle of many plants is determined by seasonal cycles of uninterrupted darkness. Poinsettias, which are kept in light/dark-controlled greenhouses to force blooming, are an example of this phenomenon.

In many urban areas, and even some rural spots, uninterrupted darkness never occurs, as we have street lights, lighted billboards, porch lights, landscape accent lighting, and an endless number of other light sources.

I called Ken King to ask whether any recent studies had addressed this issue. I also talked with him about the apparent absence of Yucca Moth activity in the Harlingen area.

Ken had a another slant on the moths in general. "Just imagine the behavior of night-flying moths which pollinate many plants," Ken remarked. "If you observe activity around your porch light for a short time, you'll see the unfortunate moths repeatedly bashing themselves against the light which is attracting them."

Are Yucca moths beating themselves to death against urban light sources?

Will we consider it important enough to provide the kind of environment (dark nights, for example) which some native plants may require to reproduce?

How many ways are we impacting the environment around us each and every day?

It is not in our nature to nurture wild things. Douglas Tallamy in "Bringing Nature Home," p27, relates: "We bring to every encounter with nature an ancient struggle for our own survival. In the old days, all too often it was nature—her predators, winters, floods, and droughts—that did us in. Those of our ancestors who were particularly good at conquering nature were the ones who survived and reproduced, so we all share genes that encourage us to beat back nature at every turn." Unfortunately, we've gone way overboard!

Dr. Tallamy mentions "Keystone Species" and Dr. McDonald shed light on that by naming some keystone species in deep south Texas. Prickly Pear and Mesquite trees could be considered keystone because many animal species share these as a major food source and also as habitat. The loss or decrease in abundance of these species would have a major domino effect, even down to the level of the fungi which transform dying plants into humus.

Gophers are keystone species in the sandy wildflower-rich areas north of Raymondville. Without these animals to aerate the soil, fertilize it, and provide shelter for myriad other creatures, the wildflower populations and the entire ecosystem would decline.

Most ecologists would say that biodiversity is essential to continued life on earth. What is easy to comprehend is: "we can preserve the plants and animals that remain on this planet so that we can use them, because we like them, and because we absolutely need them for our own survival." (Tallamy, p39)

We'll have the opportunity to hear Douglas Tallamy speak in October at McAllen's beautiful Quinta Mazatlan. Details about that event are included on p 6 of this edition of the Sabal.

No seedpods have formed on this *Yucca treculeana*, photographed in Harlingen by C. Mild. This is a usual sight. Fortunately, this species also reproduces by offshoots!



Butterfly Explosion!

Most of the talk and excitement about butterflies is related to “**migration**.” What we have around here every fall is a butterfly “**explosion**.” When conditions are right (moisture is a key factor) butterflies will be hatching out in every piece of diverse habitat in deep south Texas. Locally, there are already a wide diversity of butterfly species which outdoor enthusiasts have recently captured on film, and some species (Queens and Snouts, for example) may hatch out in enormous numbers. (If insecticides are absent!)

American Snouts are the only group I’m aware of which appear to “migrate” around here. In some years, they move in great masses, and great numbers of them die on car windshields and grills. (The heat of roadways probably helps to keep them aloft for their travels.) However, they don’t move in any predictable direction. Undoubtedly, they’re able to detect the chemicals their host plants produce, and are moving towards a place where those plants are in abundance. That abundance of a particular plant is probably relative to how much rain a particular area has received.

The lack or scarcity of a host plant may also be due to human bulldozing, mowing, or even herbicide or insecticide use. The places where those activities occur aren’t something a butterfly can predict.

Our Monarchs complete their entire life cycle here, and generally don’t migrate away from the area. We aren’t part of the various migratory pathways Monarchs utilize. Still, our population of resident Monarchs are beautiful, wonderful, and should be encouraged by protection and planting of milkweed species.

*Migration is awesome,
but an explosion of butterflies is wondrous.*

What Are You Planning To Do This Month?

There are an incredible number of opportunities to participate in the upcoming months in various nature tours, revegetation efforts, and festivals.

I’ve also found a bounty of wonderful photos showing the relationships between insects and our native plants, which I’ve received permission to print in this issue.

This issue will focus on the opportunities to go outdoors, or to lectures, to learn and to enjoy. And you’ll find plenty of photos in this issue which I hope will encourage you to go out and see these wonders for yourself.



This **Monarch** butterfly was nectaring in April at Ramsey Park on Texas Thistle. Monarchs are present here year-round when conditions allow their survival. I have photographed them on South Padre Island in January. C. Mild photo.



Queens may be with us year-round also. This one was nectaring on Spring Mistflower in March, at Ramsey Park in Harlingen. C. Mild photo.



American Snout, also at Ramsey Park, Oct. 2013. This photo is almost life-size. Host-plants are Hackberry and Spiny Hackberry (Granjeno). Barry Nall reports sightings of Snouts in every month of the year. See the Life-cycle at: [leps.thenalls.net]. Mild photo.

It's a great time to venture outdoors.

Here are some of the places you may want to visit and activities you may enjoy:



Left: A worn (old) but beautiful 2-barred Flasher Butterfly nectaring on *Lantana camara*, photographed at the National Butterfly Center (NABA) in Mission, TX by Beverly Manuel Pardue.

Guided Walks at the National Butterfly Center in Mission are Saturday morning, 10AM-noon. There is no cost other than admission to the center - membership, or \$5 for local residents and winter Texans.

TX Butterfly Festival: at NABA from Oct. 31-Nov. 3.

[<http://nationalbutterflycenter.org/>]

City of McAllen Parks and Recreation
McAllen Nature Center
4101 W Business 83 • McAllen, TX 78501 • (956) 681-3333
www.facebook.com/McAllenNatureCenter

DISCOVER & EXPLORE THE OUTDOORS

McAllen Nature Center has expanded hours and they offer several classes or activities each day.

From Oct.—April, hours are 8am to 5pm daily. For more information check out their Facebook page (above). Recreation Supervisor Tiffany L. Kersten invites you to visit. Phone: 681-3333.

Native plant tours, Thursday at 11am, are led by botany grad student/staff botanist, Raziel Flores. Above right: Above right: Passionflower packed with moths and other insects. Photo taken by Tiffany Kersten at McAllen NC.



Left: Eufala Skipper on Anacua, taken at **Estero Llano Grande**, 9/11/15 by Mike Rickard <mikearickard@gmail.com> "up over my head."

Bird Walks on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays at 8:30am (many tours led by John Yochum, see p1)
Tram Tours on Sunday afternoons from 2pm to 4pm
Junior Rangers (especially for kids 6+over) Saturdays at 9am
Butterfly Walks on Fridays at 10:30am
Night Hikes Sep 13 and 27 (Sunday nights)

[<http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/estero-llano-grande/ents>]

Right: Pixie butterfly nectaring on Climbing Milkweed (*Funastrum cynanchoides*), host plant to Monarch, Queen, and Soldier butterflies, is also a good nectar source. Photo by Javi Gonzalez.

From **Oct 2015 thru April 2016**, two monthly nature tours will be provided at no charge at **Ramsey Park** in Harlingen. Anyone interested should meet in the parking lot.

Native Plants with Barbara Peet: 1st Friday monthly from 9-11 am.
Birding Tour with Alicia Cavazos: 3rd Friday monthly from 8-11am.
For more information, call Frank Wiseman at 364-1410.





This series of photos of Scoliid wasps was taken by Javi Gonzalez. He relates: "Wasps can be pretty colorful and interesting. I found this one pollinating some White Brush flowers ... Best ID I can come up with is *Campsomeris tolteca*, a type of Scoliid Wasp. I like that orange/ red color on the abdomen. It also had a habit of raising some legs while feeding." This wasp doesn't normally bite people.



Above: Long-billed Thrasher with bug at **Edinburg Scenic Wetlands & WWBC**, photo by Javi Gonzalez.
 Upper Right: Two Huisache Girdling Beetles in the shade beneath a Tepeguaje, photo by John Brush.

Bird walks led by Javi Gonzalez are offered at Edinburg WBC
 every Tues. morning from 8:30-10am thru spring.

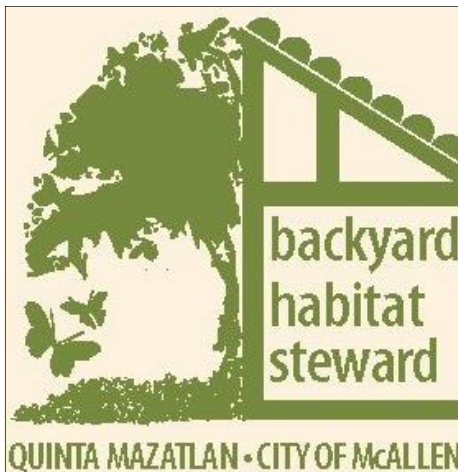
For information on more programs, visit: [www.edinburgwbc.org]



Above: Female flower of Spiny Hackberry/Granjeno (*Celtis pallida*), with developing fruit below the bloom. Photo by John Brush at McAllen Nature Center. "These photos were taken with my 21x Olloclip for my iPhone," says John.



Right: Here's a shot of a Yellow-billed Cuckoo with a Santa Ana Tussock moth caterpillar. Taken at Edinburg Scenic Wetlands. This extraordinary photo was taken by Kenneth Wilson.



Backyard Habitat Steward classes at McAllen's beautiful **Quinta Mazatlan**. Tuesdays from Oct. 13th to Nov. 17th, 9am-noon. \$60/person.

Call 681-3370 to reserve your space.

Instructors include: Carol Goolsby, Environmental Educator; Mike Heep, Native Plant Grower; Quinta Mazatlan staff, Ed Kuprel, Edinburg's Urban Forester; Allen Williams, Native Plant Landscaper; and Ken King, author of "Plants of Deep South Texas."

[www.quintamazatlan.com]



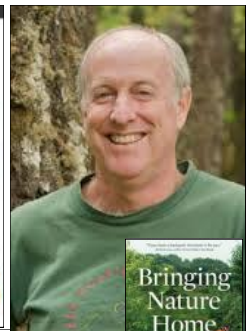
Flat-footed bugs, *Anisoscelis affinis*, passionvine-feeding bugs reported in the 1940's, only recorded once per decade since the 1970's. Photo by John Brush at Quinta, on an ornamental blooming plant.

Planta Nativa

Quinta Mazatlan Native Plant Festival

October 23-24, 2015

600 Sunset Drive • McAllen, Texas
(956) 681-3370 • www.quintamazatlan.com



FRIDAY EVENING
Creating Living Landscapes
Food • Beer • Wine • Art • Keynote Speaker
October 23rd • 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm

\$15 Advance Tickets Required (Available at Quinta Mazatlan)

SATURDAY MORNING
Native Plant Festival
October 24th 9:00 am to 2:00 pm

\$5 Admission at the Quinta Mazatlan Gates

Keynote speaker is Douglas Tallamy, author of "Bringing Nature Home." Fri., 8pm, Sat. 10am.

Native Plant Sales: M.Heep, B.Perez, S.&J.Lovegren
Book Signing by Tallamy.
Art Gallery Exhibit & Sale.
9am Sat. garden tours.



White Peacock on Scorpiontail; photo by Diana Miller.

Saturday speakers include:
11:30am Allen Williams: Creating Living Landscapes.
Native Plant Project: Arroyo Colorado Habitat.

For more information about Rio Reforestation, please call: US Fish & Wildlife 956-784-7575.

Cosponsored by Valley Proud Environmental Council. This event will take place on the Ranchito Tract of the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Please bring your own shovel, work clothes, gloves and sun screen. Food and refreshments will be provided. Volunteers will plant tree and shrub seedlings on 25 acres of refuge land to restore valuable wildlife habitat.



Plant a tree for you and me

Saturday, October 17
from **8am-noon**

Rain Date: October 31

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

(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:

Williams Wildscapes, Inc.

(Allen Williams)

750 W Sam Houston

Pharr, TX 78577

(956) 460-9864

[www.williamswildscapes.com]

Landscaping, Etc. Inc.

Noel Villarreal

125 N. Tower Rd, Edinburg

956-874-4267

956-316-2599

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 <heepsnursery@gmail.com>

[www.heepsnursery.com]



Come visit the VNC:

301 S. Border Ave.

Weslaco, TX 78596

(956) 969-2475

info@valleynaturecenter.org

www.valleynaturecenter.org



**Native Plants
for Sale**

*Watch Birds
& Butterflies*

*A Secret Garden
in the Heart of the
Rio Grande Valley*

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



Above: Buff-bellied Hummer photographed by Dan & Honeylet Jones. They were looking for butterflies at the old Hidalgo Pumphouse. "Monk Parakeets continually screeched while the Black Phoebes hunted and Clay-colored Thrushes clucked and squealed." they report.

Right: Cassin's Sparrow with green insect in bill. Photographed south of Hebbronville by Katherine Miller.

NPP Board & General Meetings held at Valley Nature Center

(see ABOVE)

(Fourth Tuesday each month)

Board Meetings 6:30pm — Speaker 7:30pm.

Meeting Dates for 2015:

Oct. 24 Sat. morning at Quinta Mazatlan, McAllen,
Nov. 24 at Valley Nature Center. No meeting or Sabal in Dec.

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

Regular \$20/yr. Contributing \$45/yr
 Life \$250 one time fee/person
Other donation: _____

Please print:

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Address _____

City _____ State ____

Phone _____ Zip _ _ _ _ - _ _ _

I'm choosing the "green option!"

Send my SABAL via .pdf file to:

Email address: _____

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

TO:

NPP May meeting/speaker on:

Tues., Sept. 22nd, 2015: at 7:30pm

The Native Plant Project will present:

***"The Plants of Estero Llano Grande
and the Wildlife They Support."***

by John Yochum,

Park Ranger at Estero Llano Grande
in Weslaco

at:

**Valley Nature Center, 301 S. Border,
(in Gibson Park) Weslaco.
956-969-2475**



In this issue:

Local Ecology,
Butterfly Explosions,
Current Nature Activities in the LRGV,
Photos of native plants and their
relationships with birds and insects.

Above: Plant of the Month, photographed by John Brush.
Location: McAllen Nature Center. Family: Nyctaginaceae
Species: *Commicarpus scandens* (Climbing Wortclub)
PDST p329. Found along shady portions of the trails.