In this issue:
October program p1 below.
Planta Nativa p 2
Fall is a Terrible Time to Prune p 2-3
Baccharis neglecta p 4
Celosia nitida p 5-6
LRGV Native Plant Sources & Landscapers, NPP Sponsors, Upcoming Meetings p 7
Membership Application (cover) p8

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

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

Editorial Advisory Board:
Mike Heep, Jan Dauphin
Ken King, Betty Perez
Eleanor Mosimann
Dr. Alfred Richardson
Ann Vacek

NPP Advisory Board
Mike Heep
Ben Nibert
Joel :-

NPP September meeting/speaker:
“Drought Adaptations Seen in the Flora of the RGV”
By Christopher Munoz

Tues., Oct. 25th, at 7:30pm

Christopher Munoz is a botanist specializing in taxonomy, biogeography (distribution of plant species & environmental parameters that govern distribution) and plant evolution. “In my talk,” Chris says, “I’ll cover drought adaptations seen in the flora of the RGV in an evolutionary context. Some examples include specialized tissues/membranes, mimicry, allelopathy, etc.” Christopher studied in Montana, focusing on biology and geology. He returned to the valley “because it is my home and a unique venue for biological research. I am pursuing a masters degree at UTRGV in interdisciplinary science, studying the distribution of rare plants in the valley.” Christopher is also Program Coordinator at Quinta Mazatlan.

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

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>
2nd Annual Planta Nativa at McAllen’s Quinta Mazatlan:

Once again, Quinta Mazatlan is hosting a series of events focused on native plants.
For details on this event, see [www.quintamazatlan.com] or call 956-681-3370.

Don’t Forget These Native Plant Activities:
Sat. Oct. 22, 6:30-9:30pm Garden Party ($20, advance ticket required.)
Local food, spirits and more. At 8pm Pam Penick presents: “Local Heroes:
Designing with Native Plants for a Water-Saving Garden”.
Sun. Oct. 23rd, 1-4pm, Native Plant Garden Tour of Homes (map provided).

Fall is a Terrible Time to Prune…

Plants we love to hate. Some of the thorny brush we love to hate, granjeno
(PDST p408) for example, serve many purposes for wildlife. Granjeno is a host
plant for the American Snout butterfly. Fruits may appear at any time of year, and
are a favorite of many birds, people, and other mammals. Granjeno is sometimes
the most abundant winter fruit. Thorny branches provide protection for many
animals and serve as a nesting site for birds.

Budding. Do you actually notice this phenomenon? Some plant specimens, even
with desperately dry and ragged foliage, will put forth growth buds after just a bit of rain. The plant, in this in-
stance, is putting forth its entire wealth of stored energy into a bit of new growth, be that in the form of leaves,
blooms or fruit. In dry seasons, this is a last ditch effort for species survival.

Quite often, these growth buds aren’t apparent to the human observer, especially if the rest of the foliage is
worn and ragged. Buds are usually green, and blend in with the rest of the surrounding foliage. Until a plant puts
forth something in the form of contrasting color, many humans will be unaware that growth buds are present. On
many occasions, I’ve lamented my husband’s pruning of our David’s Milkberry (PDST 369, Chiococca alba).
His answer is always the same: “But it didn’t have any blooms or berries.” Well, after such pruning, it would
have neither of those for a very long while.

All around us are examples of plants which should be in bloom, and aren’t. On landscaped traffic islands,
cenizo will be pruned into some “artful” shape, rounded or squared off. Any potential bloom buds are sheared
off, repeatedly.

Valley Morning Star employees were always mystified why their very healthy Crucita (PDST 91)specimens
never bloomed. They were “artfully” pruned on a regular basis. Jan Dauphin notes: “the last good trim on Cru-
cita should be in August to prevent cutting forming buds.”

When a plant has pushed stored energy into the formation of bloom buds, and those are removed, it will take
time, along with some watering or rain, for the plant to become healthy once again.

Left: Budding growth tips on
Whitebrush (PDST 411) Lippia
graveolens. Most of the plant, like
the abundant fuzzy seeds, was
quite dry.

Right: About an inch of budding
growth is yellowish in this light.
This is a Barbados Cherry (PDST
301), Malpighia glabra. Without
very good lighting, growth buds
are often hard to visualize.
More on Why Fall Pruning Is a Bad Idea: Increased Wildlife Pressure.

Many of us enjoy the nature festivals which take place in the fall: Planta Nativa, Wild in Willacy, RGV Birding Festival and Mission Butterfly Festival, to name a few.

Why are local wildlife festivals held in fall?

Bird Migration: Three major migratory flyways converge in the LRGV. In fall, birds are flying south to escape the cold of the north. We can’t predict when and where huge flocks of birds will descend upon the area. Birds descend according to wind and weather. We do know that hundreds of thousands of birds visit us on their way south (and north in the spring). What do these birds need? Often we see them at feeders and watering stations. Many species avoid humans. These visit us as well, though they seek food and shelter in the vegetation. Some descend on grassy areas, others are mostly hidden as they work the brush. Thus, wildlife pressure on the native vegetation is much increased in the fall.

Butterfly Emergence: Fall is also the season when butterfly numbers and diversity increase enormously. They will lay eggs on their favorite host plant, if it can be found. This means butterflies are looking for leaves. The branch you cut from a shrub or tree may have provided food for several butterfly larvae.

Below: Anna Manuel’s photo of budding Zizotes (PDST 75) is especially poignant, as this native milkweed species often occurs in areas most disturbed by man, such as roadsides. Asclepias oenotheroides.)
Baccharis neglecta. Asteraceae (Compositae)
Roosevelt Weed, Poverty Weed, False-willow, New Deal Weed, Jara Dulce

Baccharis neglecta is a tall shrub with many willow-like branches covered with very dark green, linear leaves. After warm rains in late summer it produces a profusion of creamy white flower clusters which are followed by silvery plumed seeds that cover the plant with a white cloud. It grows from N. Carolina to Arizona, and throughout Texas except in deep East Texas and the High Plains. Roosevelt weed is one of the first plants to invade abandoned fields, roadsides and disturbed habitats. It is extremely drought tolerant, accepting wet or dry sites, and can grow in soils high in salt. The historical references of its common names purportedly come from the fact that after the great Dust Bowl, it was planted as a fast and easy way to revegetate the severely damaged soil. But the qualities that made it useful then make it an increasing problem now. Both B. halimifolia and B. neglecta have become aggressive invaders of rangeland and disturbed sites from the Blackland Prairie to South Texas, and in other western states as well, so plant them - or any seep willow - intentionally only with great caution, if at all. They spread fast, quickly overtaking forage plants, and their deep roots use up a disproportionate amount of water. They are also very flammable. Once established they are very difficult to eradicate, since livestock avoid them and they produce seeds prolifically.

Paragraph above is from: [http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/ornamentals/nativeshrubs/baccharisneglecta.htm]

In dry parts of the valley, the most prolific blooms this fall may be on vast colonies of Baccharis (PDST 87-88). For allergy sufferers, this is unfortunate, as pollen is carried on the wind and is allergenic. Male flowers (yellow) and female flowers (white) are borne on separate plants. The tiny fruit (dry achenes) are hard to distinguish from the blooms without careful examination.

As Baccharis is a plant of disturbed areas and humankind continues to disturb habitats with great vigor, it will likely continue to spread into new places. It is adaptable to various soils and has high heat tolerance.

Right: Along the arroyo’s banks in Harlingen, many Baccharis are entwined with climbing milkweed (PDST 79, Funastrum cynanchoides). Baccharis provides ample support for the milkweed vine, a host plant for Queen, Monarch and Soldier butterflies.

Even Baccharis can be good for something.

Left: A newly-emerged Queen butterfly continues to fill its wings with fluid. From the photos of Jan & David Dauphin, posted on their website at: [http://www.thedauphins.net/id121.html]
Native plant grower Mike Heep has grown *Celosia nitida* for many years. “I think this is a good little plant for birds,” he notes. It takes a while to notice this rather inconspicuous plant, and even longer to distinguish it from species with similar foliage.

One encounters this slender relative of showy Cocks Comb in many different local settings: shaded places on the *lomas*, Resaca edges, sunny trailsides in the Harlingen Thicket, at Palo Alto Battlefield, and in many of the most shaded sections of dense brush.

In the sunniest areas, and wherever plants are drought-stressed, *Celosia* leaves exhibit the red coloration we often associate with fall foliage. Pigeonberry leaves show this same coloration and are similar in other features. This red coloration provides a nice contrast, especially at times when colorful blossoms are not abundant in the brush. Stems may also show reddish coloration.

“Small birds hang out near the *Celosia nitida* in my greenhouse,” Heep tells me. “There’s some circumstantial evidence that birds are eating it, as well.” Heep continues. “The plant is widespread locally, and the seeds would not have blown to so many places. Something is eating the seeds and carrying them around.”

Most of the common names for the plant add much confusion. *Albahaca*, for instance, also refers to basil, which is remarkably different. West Indian Cocks Comb is wildly confusing, as one would imagine something like the decorative species of Celosia sold in nurseries. *Celosia nitida*, though attractive, is far from conspicuous.

Several websites list the inconspicuous plant as larval food source of the Aztec Scallopwing butterfly, *Staphylus azteca*. This butterfly has not yet been reported in Texas, but the growth of butterfly watching as a hobby brings new local sightings of different species everyday.

A virtual herbarium website maintained by the state of Florida lists the distribution of *Celosia nitida* as: Florida, Texas, West Indies, Central and South America. It is considered native to Florida and is listed by the state as endangered.

It is also listed on another website as a weed, though no supporting information of any kind is included.

Correll and Johnston describe the distribution in Texas as: “extending through the Rio Grande Plains into the Edwards Plateau.” They include sandy soils and gravelly hills as likely places to encounter the plant. (*Manual of the Vascular Plants of Texas*, 1979.)

*Celosia nitida* was originally reported in 1791 with a type specimen collected in Texas. Another botanist reported the plant in 1849, conferring the name *Celosia texana*. Despite botanists’ long familiarity with the plant’s existence, one finds few photos of it anywhere. In the wild, especially in dry times and growing in shade, it’s difficult to photograph. Stems will be elongated and leaves may be sparse. (continued on p 6)
Enlarged photos of crowded blooms and black seeds. Pollinating bees are hard at work.
This specimen was copiously watered.

Mike Heep finds *Celosia nitida* very attractive when it’s nicely fertilized and watered. He thought it might work out as a groundcover. “It’s tough as nails,” he tells me, though I’ve always found it soft and smooth to touch. He was, of course, describing an ability to survive drought, relying on an underground tuber.

Correll & Johnston point out a perennial nature, long woody taproot, slender erect or vinelike stems, and alternate leaves.

*Celosia nitida* has not become a popular landscaping plant, though it’s pretty enough to become one.

Bees appear to be the primary pollinators.

In the Mild’s Harlingen yard on the arroyo, Celosia has seeded throughout the back yard, after growing there for many years.

---

Stan Sterba photographed this White-Lined Sphinx Moth on Fall Mistflower, Crucita (PDST 91).

 Crucita (Blue Mistflower) is our best fall butterfly nectar plant, and it sometimes blooms in spring and winter.

Note the antennae on this moth, which hummingbirds do not have.
Sphinx Moths are often confused with hummingbirds due to similarities in flight.
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]

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) 583-5400
Mariana 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:

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

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-

Photo above: Fruiting Snake Eyes shrub (PDST 55), Phaulothamnus spinescens. Ants are busy doing who knows what. The white scale insects are identified by John Goodsby as Wax Scale Ceroplastes. “Their parasitoids, an aphelenid wasp and a fly, will clean them up,” John says. (C. Mild photo, Ramsey Park.)
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:
Name________________________________________
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

---

**NPP March meeting/speaker:**
**Tues., October 25th, 7:30pm**

The Native Plant Project will present:

“Drought Adaptations Seen in the Flora of the RGV”
By Christopher Munoz

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

---

Above: Western Pygmy blue butterflies on their host plant: Sea Purslane (PDST 56), *Sesuvium verrucosum*. Photo by John Yochum, taken at Estero Llano Grande. An unidentified spiky insect was also captured in the shot.

Left: Acacia greggii var. wrightii (PDST 240) in bloom and stages of fruiting. C. Mild photo, Ramsey Park.