



The Sabal

March 2014

Volume 31, number 3

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March 2014 Mtg., Native Plant Project:

Tues., March 25th, 2014: at 7:30pm

The Native Plant Project will present its annual **"Wildflowers of South Texas"** program. Ann Vacek created the PowerPoint of this year's glorious roadside beauty, but a business trip will keep her away.

Diann Ballesteros will share her vast knowledge as she presents Ann's program. We have two of NPP's native plant experts collaborating to show you the abundant wildflowers that paint the meadows with color after a wet season.

The meeting is held at:

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



Wildflowers you may see around town include this purple-blooming Dakota Vervain, PDST p413. Masses of this beautiful colony-forming wildflower are often seen along roadsides and in vacant lots. Bloom color varies from purple to pink.

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 - (956)-968-8890 - <wk_king01@yahoo.com>

“Mid-March in the Mid-Valley”

- by *Christina Mild*

Transformation of a Neglected Area

As I walked through Harlingen’s Ramsey Nature Park in mid-March on the prowl for photos, I was reminded of the many rescuers involved in the transformation of the former city dump into an oasis.

Around me, birds chirped, peeped, and sang by the multitudes. Bees and other insects were busy at work and some of the butterflies stayed around long enough for great photos.

Around every corner, another wonderful aroma enveloped me from yet a different blooming tree or shrub. Beautiful new spring foliage was gorgeous and the very picture of environmental health.

I can’t remember the origin of every rescued or donated plant, or even all the areas where Diann Ballesteros and I (and others) spread various kinds of native seeds.

But I certainly remembered what Ramsey looked like when I first visited there, before revegetation had begun. My daughter and I went in search of wildflowers for a future science fair project. There were various wildflowers to be found, but the bulk of the vegetation was mesquite and guinea grass.

There is still guinea grass which begs to be sprayed with RoundUp. I pull many clumps of it, with the camera bumping around in peril (over a shoulder and under an arm) as I do so.

There are also many places where guinea grass has been replaced with beauty and diversity which is well-used by animals and appreciated by human visitors. Wherever the heinous grass has reinfested shrubs, they’re less healthy in appearance than specimens unencumbered by this competitor.

I wish everyone had the opportunity I did, a huge “blank canvas” on which to work, a place where wildflowers would not be mown, where insects would not be sprayed, and larvae could eat their fill.

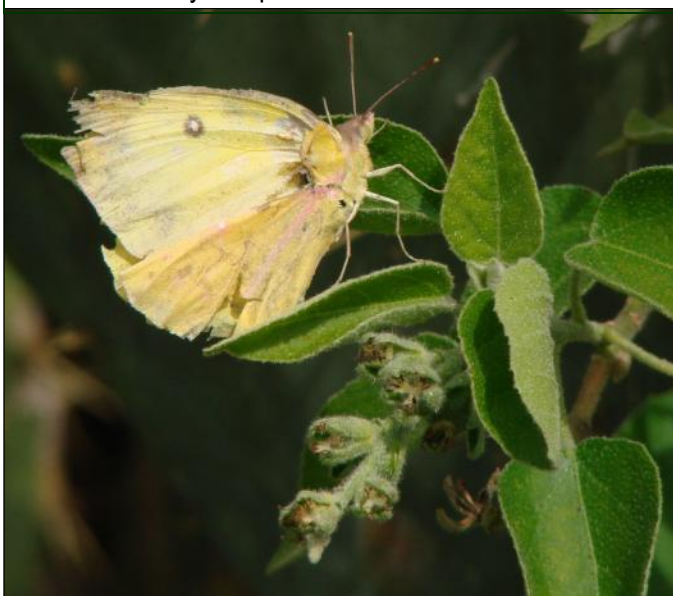
In most towns, there is probably a place where such volunteer efforts would be welcome. I hope you’ll be inspired to find one of these places and get working, before temperatures soar once again!

(Try to avoid the chiggers!)



Above: Long-billed thrasher sings in a sweet-smelling blooming Huisache, PDST p240. Note his open bill.

Below: Worn Southern Dogface butterfly on Low Croton, *Croton humilis*, PDST p217. This croton species and several other woody species are wildspread but never found in large colonies. In dry weather, they almost disappear. They are beautiful as landscape plants and are butterfly hostplants.





Seeds and fruits are not abundant here just now.

Upper Left: Texas Bristlegrass, one of the most successful native grass reintroductions at Ramsey Park, seems to bear seed through much of the year. This grass species was rescued from several sites and appears now in many areas of the park.

Cacti may be late in blooming this year due to many successive cold fronts. Diann Ballesteros photographed Glory of Texas, Center, PDST p173, blooming in her yard. She also has Pincushion Cactus, PDST p168, in bloom. In Ramsey, Mammillaria prolifera, PDST p169, blooms in a small cactus garden. (In previous years, Ladyfinger Cactus, PDST p165, has bloomed prolifically as early as March 16.)

Green coma fruit, Upper Right, is abundant on some specimens; the sweet, ripe, sticky almost-black fruit is a favorite of birds, PDST p382. Coma produces thickets (comals) from lateral roots. It is abundant in the Arroyo brush and throughout the valley. Guinea grass control is essential in allowing a comal to develop.

The long velvety-black seedpods of Huisachillo, Middle Right, PDST p241, can be found on the shrub almost throughout the year. In dried seedpods, remaining sugars are crystallized inside. The blooms of Huisachillo are perhaps even more fragrant than those of Huisache. The difference in their seedpods is an excellent distinguishing characteristic. (Seedpods of Huisache are shorter, shiny, hard to bust open and typically fall off long before the next spring.)

Mulberry, Right, PDST p324, was introduced from China, typically in hopes of producing silk. It has become naturalized and is one of our earliest fruit-bearing local trees. While it requires more water than many native trees, it is like a bird-magnet during spring migration. Be aware that commercial nursery stock is often non-fruit bearing. You can start your own plant from seed or get one from Mike Heep. Birds plant them all over his place after feasting at a neighbor's tree. Maybe they even do it on purpose! What better place to grow?



Chapote PDST p205.



Guayacan PDST p425.



Black Brush PDST p241.



More Signs Of A Cool, Wet Spring

Several vines are beginning to reappear due to abundant moisture. Vines are often the first plants to disappear during drought. Insects are abundant on this blooming *Urvillea ulmacea*, PDST p381. It's an excellent butterfly nectar plant.



Bee on Bee Brush, PDST p411.

Beaked Vervain PDST p414. Even tiny wildflowers attract pollinators, such as this small, well-camouflaged Skipper.



Perityle microglossa, PDST p117. This colony-forming wildflower has spread over a hill, across a path and down the bank at Ramsey Park. Thanks, M.Heep!



Perhaps the first Yellow Water Lily bloom of spring, PDST p333.

LRGV Native Plant Sources

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(Mike Heep)

1714 S. Palm Court Drive

Harlingen, TX 78552

(956) 423-4513 * By appt. only

Valley Nature Center

301 S. Border Ave.

Weslaco, TX 78596

(956) 969-2475

<info@valleynaturecenter.org>

[www.valleynaturecenter.org]

Perez Ranch Nursery

(Betty Perez & Susan Thompson)

12 miles north of La Joya, TX

(956) 580-8915

<PerezRanchNatives@gmail.com>

Mother Nature's Creations

(Billy & Sue Snider)

2822 Nueces; Harlingen, TX 78550

Nursery open by appointment:

(956) 428-4897

NABA Butterfly Park

Old Military Hwy & Butterfly Pk Dr

Mission, TX 78552

(956) 583-9009

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

Landscaper using Natives:

Williams Wildscapes, Inc.

(Allen Williams)

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[www.williamswildscapes.com]

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NPP Board & General Meetings held at Valley Nature Center (see ABOVE)

(Fourth Tuesday each month)

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



Apr. 22nd, 2014—"Hiding in Plain Sight - How Host Plants Protect Caterpillars" by **Berry Nall**. Berry is a pastor and teacher living in Falcon Heights, TX. He spends much of his free time roaming the RGV, photographing butterflies and searching native plants to identify the caterpillars that feed on them.

May 27th, 2014—"Ocelots and Tamaulipan Thornscrub" by **Marion Mason**. Mason has been Refuge Ranger at Laguna Atascosa NWR for 4 years. She has over 20 years experience in Natural Resource Interpretation. She lives in a dome home in Bayview with her husband, dog and cat, along with horses, cows, chickens and turkeys. Her favorite LRGV plant is ebony.

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: _____

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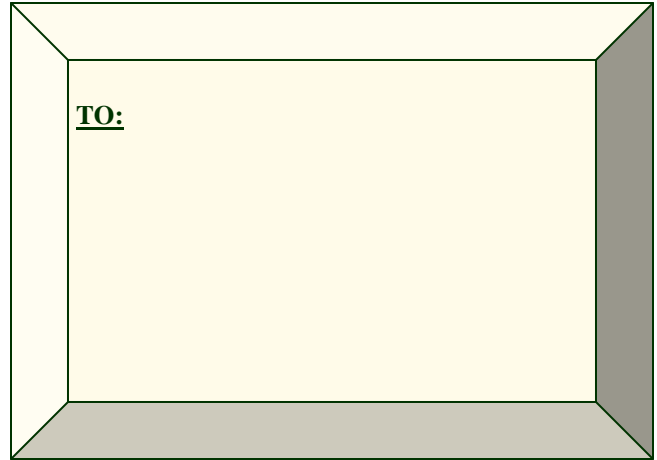
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NPP March meeting/speaker on:

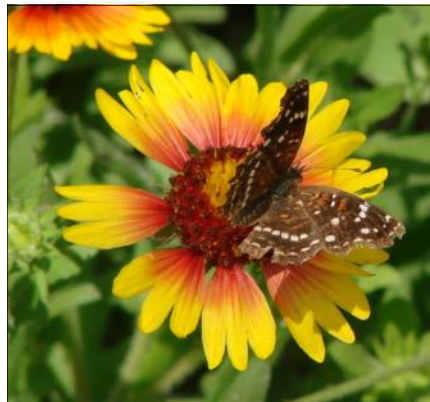
Tues., March 25th, 2014: **at 7:30pm**

“Wildflowers of South Texas”

The Native Plant Project (NPP) proudly announces a PowerPoint created by Ann Vacek and **presented by Diann Ballesteros.**

at:

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



Left:

Almost life-size photos of Indian Blanket, *Gaillardia pulchella*, PDST p. 100. Nice-sized colonies of these wildflowers are found in several places in Harlingen's Ramsey Nature Park. They were established from wild-collected seed gathered from around the valley. When the seed is ripe, it almost appears to be exploding from the seed-head. If seed isn't already loose, it isn't ready for collection. Keep any collected seed dry so that it will not mold or germinate prematurely.

*The Native Plant Project
**may also be sponsoring a fieldtrip
to Delmita on March 30th.***

*Check the website
after March 25th for details, or
attend the meeting to get the scoop!*

This month's SABAL topic: "Mid-March in the Mid-Valley"