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“Plants of Deep South Texas,” (PDST).

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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.

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“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!)
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?
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.

*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.

Guayacan PDST p425.

Chapote PDST p205.

Bee on Bee Brush, PDST p411.

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

Black Brush PDST p241.
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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.
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
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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

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!

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.

This month’s SABAL topic: “Mid-March in the Mid-Valley”