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“Plants of Deep South Texas,” (PDST).

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Submissions of relevant articles and/or photos are welcomed.

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May 2014 Mtg., Native Plant Project:
Tues., May 27th, 2014: at 7:30pm
The Native Plant Project will present:
“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 meeting is held 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>
“April 14, 2014 in the Western Valley”  
*by Christina Mild*

Ken King graciously included me on a plant rescue trip to the Rio Grande City area on Good Friday, a school holiday for him. There were enough interesting plants on that journey to create several Sabal issues.

Our main mission was to rescue plants from areas which had been scraped almost clean of vegetation.

Some areas we visited were especially hard for Ken to dig, such as the area shown above, where fossilized oyster shells were plentiful. The silver-gray leaf plant left of the oyster shell is *Bahia absinthifolia*, PDST p 89.

The plants which reappeared in these brutally-scrapped areas might remind you of a desert garden, as they were widely spaced.

*Tulipan del Monte* (shown on pg. 8) occurs throughout the valley on edges of recently-disturbed vegetation. This small plant is a good indicator that whatever vegetation was recently-removed was high in species diversity and the land probably was not farmed or frequently-mown in recent years.

A bit of disturbance favors certain species, while other species are easily wiped out, probably not to return to that area without revegetation efforts.

Just across the road from where we worked was a small area of brush which had not been cleared. Amongst the scrub brush a multitude of cacti grew, including the Strawberry Pitaya (PDST p 164, *Echinocereus enneacanthus*) pictured above. Cacti are some of the diverse species which are quickly and forever lost in most land-clearing schemes.

Where Ken dug and I documented, large black piles of burned brush indicated that we were working in a recently-cleared site. The amount of land clearing in the unique habitats of the western valley is especially alarming.

The area could probably be considered part of the Hebbronville Plain, and described as hilly, with caliche and gravel.

The unique plant communities of this area, where average yearly rainfall is 20.95”, are likely due to the following: “The significant differences in rainfall across the region, plus the differences in soils and to a lesser extent differences in temperature, are considered the most influential factors determining the presence of various plant associations.” (PDST p 3)
Plants with Fleshy Roots —

Some of the most difficult plants to rescue are those with fleshy roots, especially if they grow deep and long. But, thankfully, species with fleshy roots tend to persist after land-scraping occurs.

The pretty dandelion relative featured on this page (held and dug with difficulty by Ken King) is a perennial, which generally covers the ground in a leafy basal rosette. Note the elongated woody (underground) stems between the leafy upper plant parts and the many fleshy roots.

The uppermost photo is a magnified view of cottony structures found at nodes on the woody underground stems. Who knows what they’re for?!

Right center: blooming specimen photographed 4/14/05 in Harlingen’s Ramsey Park, rescued from land clearing in the eastern valley. Note the saw-toothed leaves.

This plant is Peonia, Acourtia runcinata (formerly Perezia). PDST p 82. The species produces ample seed, which infrequently germinates in the wild. It has an infrequent but valley-wide distribution and blooms when moisture is available from spring through fall.

Bottom right: Magnified photo by Dr. Al Richardson showing the 2-lipped individual flowers which make up the composite bloom. Also photographed at Ramsey Park, 1/16/10.
“April 14, 2014 in the Western Valley” continued:

Plants Which Persist After Land Scraping:

More Species with Fleshy Roots —

**Jicamilla, Jatropha cathartica**

PDST p 225, Family Euphorbiaceae

In these photos, you’ll notice the very dry, cracked soils from which Ken dug several specimens of Jicamilla.

My interpretation of the oddly-shaped underground tuber, bottom left, is that the land was cleared several times, with the root being cut off at several places, followed by regrowth.

In the U.S., Jicamilla is found only in Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr counties.

The beautiful red male and female blooms are separate, occurring on the same plant.

The unusual leaf color and shape, in addition to the brightly-colored blooms, make this a gorgeous cultivated plant. It is often planted with the fleshy tuber exposed. It may become dormant in winter. Avoid cold moist growing conditions. Provide good drainage.

The middle right photo outlined in yellow includes Jicamilla’s seedpod, in the shape typical of a Euphorbia. (And a land snail shell.)

The bottom right photo shows a more typical tuber, partially exposed. The common name of Jicamilla probably refers to the tuber’s resemblance to the commonly-cultivated and eaten Jicama.

Consuming Jicamilla would probably be a cathartic experience; you’d likely vomit! Thus, the species name *cathartica*.

It is toxic to livestock. However, they avoid eating it unless they’re starving. Signs of poisoning are associated with the gastrointestinal system and include: weakness, diarrhea (at times with dark blood), and death.
“April 14, 2014 in the Western Valley” continued:

Plants Which Persist After Land Scraping:

Another Species with Fleshy Roots —

**Scarlet Musk Flower, Devil’s Bouquet, *Nyctaginea capitata***

PDST p 331 Nyctaginaceae (Four O’Clock family)

This is another of our natives which has an extremely long, tuberous root. It is perennial, deciduous and beautiful.

Scarlet Muskflower is reported to attract hummingbirds and provides excellent butterfly nectar. (Photo on top right taken by Gil Quintanilla on 9/4/2004.) The butterfly is a large orange.

Blooms occur from April to November. They open in the cool of evening (or on cool days, as when the photo middle right was taken). Blooms close in hot sun of the following day.

In the U.S., this species is found only in New Mexico and Texas. It occurs locally in Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr counties. Native habitat is sandy, loamy or caliche soils along roadsides and in fields, mainly in the southern half of Texas.

Sun to part shade is preferred and good drainage is required. Seed can sometimes be ordered from Native American Seed [www.seedsource.com], although it is currently not in stock. Fruit is dry and leathery and about 1/4” tall. The lower right photo shows mature seeds on the dried flower cluster.

Some find the blooms to have an offensive musky odor. Leaves and stems are covered with sticky glands. Other individuals report that they do not find the blooms or the glandular, sticky leaves to be offensive. In any case, the plant should be conserved.

**Hierba de la Hormiga (Ant Plant), *Allionia incarnata***

PDST p 327 Nyctaginaceae (Four O’Clock family)

This is a closely-related but less noticeable plant which occurs in Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr counties. The blooming photo on bottom left is approximately life-size.

Doves feed on the seeds. Photo above right shows a much-magnified image of the unusual fruit (seed) with triangular toothed incurved wings and two rows of glands on the concave surface. This photo was posted on the website “Vascular Plants of the Gila Wilderness,” Western New Mexico Univ. Dept. of Natural Sciences. The photo was taken by Russ Kleinman, on Ridge Road at the Grant County/Silver City, New Mexico, airport, on September 28, 2009.

I find no information regarding root structure or propagation methods, though this pretty plant has some potential as a landscape plant in gravelly or sandy soils. Attractive photos are found on the web.

Photo bottom right, much-magnified, shows that the bloom is actually one involucre with three separate flowers. (Photo by Russ Kleinman & Deming Gustafson, Burro Mtns., Engineer Canyon, October 17, 2009. Same website as above.)
"April 14, 2014 in the Western Valley” continued:
Interesting Plants of Hard-Packed Western Roadsides

Tailed Rushpea
*Caesalpinia caudata*
PDST p 231 (Legume Family)
In PDST, one sees the “tails” which occur on the seedpods. Photo right shows distinctive stripes on the seedpods. These are composed of red glands, which also give color to the unopened bloom buds and occur on stems. The plants spread from rhizomes, forming clumps. They are found in sandy soils from Starr to Webb county in Texas. The plants are quite attractive.

Upright Non-Twining Noseburn
*Tragia ramosa* or possibly *amblyodonta*
For those who enjoy unusual plants, this pretty, prickly plant may be of interest. The more common *Tragia glanduligera* is easily-grown from rescued transplants and spreads rapidly (in some cases, too rapidly). This upright, non-twining plant might be more manageable. Note the tiny yellow blooms, which do not bear stinging hairs, unlike the rest of the plant. Some species of *Tragia* are known to be host plants for the Blue-Eyed Sailor, Common Mestra, Gray Cracker and Red Rim butterflies. It’s an attractive perennial, growing to 16” tall. (Family Euphorbiaceae.) Related Species: PDST p 229-230.

Coulter’s Wrinklefruit
*Tetraclea coulteri*
Family Verbenaceae
This plant is supposedly easily recognized from the bad-smelling flowers. What I noticed is that there could be either four or five petals. Found in Hidalgo and Starr counties.

In desert areas, blooms typically open only in the evening or on cloudy days. The bottom right photo shows the four-lobed green “wrinklefruits”.

(Photo right found at: “Southeastern Arizona Wildflowers and the Plants of the Sonoran Desert.”) [fireflyforest.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.

Remaining Meeting Dates for 2014:
September 23rd,
October 28th,
November 25th

Photo right: Orange and yellow blooms, on one Prickly Pear Pad, found in regions of the western LRGV, near Rio Grande City.

LRGV Native Plant Sources
See also our Sponsors on right

Perez Ranch Nursery
(Betty Perez & Susan Thompson)
12 miles north of La Joya, TX
(956) 580-8915
<PerezRanchNatives@gmail.com>

NABA Butterfly Park
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

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Pharr, TX 78577
(956) 460-9864
[www.williamswildscapes.com]

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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.

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TO:

NPP March meeting/speaker on:

Tues., May 27th, 2014: at 7:30pm

The Native Plant Project will present:

Ocelots and Tamaulipan Thornscrub
by Marion Mason
at:
Valley Nature Center,
301 S. Border, (in Gibson Park)
Weslaco. 956-969-2475

LEFT: Nymphs in gravel, probably of the species Largus bipustulatus, identified by Mike Quinn of Austin, TX <entomike@gmail.com>. ABOVE: Tulipan del Monte, PDST p 310, Hibiscus martianus, Heart Leaf Hibiscus. This species needs good drainage and blooms from spring through fall after rains (or watering). Difficult to grow from seed. Rapidly disappearing from our shrinking diverse native vegetation.

This month’s SABAL topic: “April 14, 2014 in the Western Valley”