



NATURE NOTES

Dedicated to the Enjoyment and Conservation of the Natural Beauty of Sun City Texas at Georgetown

VOLUME 23

Issue 9

September 2021

Tuesday, September 21, 2:30 p.m., SCB Supermassive Black Holes for Fun – Not Profit

Presented by Dr. Mark Bottorff, Dept of Physics,
Southwestern University
Check meeting announcement for mask requirements

Tuesday, October 19, 2:30 p.m., SCB A Walk on the Wild Side

Presented by Ghost Speaker
Check meeting announcement for mask requirements

MEMBERSHIP DUES: \$4 for 2021

Dues include our monthly programs and all Special Interest Group programs and activities.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGs)

Nature Club activities are posted on the Nature Club website calendar. E-mails are sent to Club members only.

REPTILES & MAMMALS

SIG Chair: Steve Kelley



REPTILE ID, RELOCATION & MAPPING

FREE service, call:

- Steve Kelley 512-639-0539
- Jim Christiansen 512-868-3504
- John Leek 713-825-0145
- Joe Plunkett 774-226-0810
- City of Georgetown Animal Control 512-930-3592



We encourage residents to leave harmless, beneficial reptiles in their landscapes, but call us so we can identify and map all reptiles.

ASTRONOMY SIG



Mon., **September 27**, Cowan Creek
Florance Room Topic TBD
Watch for Special Viewing announcements.
SIG Chairs: Richard Wagoner & David Lingo

BIRDING SIG

Wed, **September 15**, 2:00 p.m., GT/F Rooms
Cowan Creek, Golden-cheeked Warbler in Texas.



BIRD WALKS

Thurs., **September 2**, Wed., **September 15**,
Thurs, **October 7**, & Wed, **October 20**. All walks 8:00 a.m.,
meet at LHPP parking lot near the lake. Any changes will be
emailed. Masks Optional
SIG Chairs: Ed Rozenburg & Martin Byhower

BUTTERFLY/MOTH SIG

No SIG Meeting in August or September



BUTTERFLY WALKS

Wed., **September 29**, 9:30 a.m. Meet at the
Tranquility trailhead.

SIG Chair: Ed Rozenburg

GEOLOGY SIG

Thurs., **October 28**, 4:00 p.m., AC Atrium,
"Minerals That Rocked the World: Quartz" by Jim
Tobin



SIG Chair: Paul Swetland

NATIVE PLANTS SIG

Mon., **September 13**, 8:00 a.m. and Wed. **September 15**,
8:00 a.m. Meet at Tranquility Trail.

Mon., **October 11**, 8:00 a.m. and Wed. **October 13**, 8:00
a.m. Meet at Tranquility Trail

SIG Chair: Pat Garren

*"September was a thirty-days long goodbye to
summer, to the season that left everybody both happy and
weary of the warm, humid weather and the exhausting but
thrilling adventures."*

- Lea Malot

*"Happily, we bask in this warm September sun, which
illuminates all creatures..."*

- Henry David Thoreau

Where are all the birds and butterflies?

When I relocated to Central Texas six years ago, one of the prime motivators for me was the diversity of wildlife in this region. I have not been disappointed: I've planted scores of native plants in my yard, and over the past few years over 100 species of birds and countless pollinators have visited me. Yet many of us have noticed declining numbers of these welcome visitors. Why is this area both species-rich yet, at the same time, showing declining numbers of these species?

A large part of this is due to increasing development and loss of habitat, but it also has a lot to do with how we manage our residences (and business properties). For example, perhaps the greatest reason we have so many species here is because of the large numbers of oak trees in our region. Oaks support over 500 species of caterpillars, which in turn are the single most important source of food for most of our insectivorous songbirds. A pair of chickadees requires between 6000 and 9000 caterpillars to bring one nest of offspring to fledging age at 16 to 18 days. Oaks are the primary keystone species at the base of habitat food webs in no less than 80% of the country! One oak tree can support thousands of species, and in fact you can think of oaks as the best possible birdfeeders you can have in your yard (unless you spray your yard with pesticides!)

Unfortunately, Oak Wilt, climate change and unbridled development threaten our trees. Planting more oaks and other native trees and shrubs is probably the best thing you can do to support local wildlife. But oak trees can't do it alone, and the biggest hindrance to them doing their job is probably Incorporating and maintaining turf in our yards. Many of us are accustomed to having extensive, perennially green grass lawns, and we even believe that we are required or at least expected to do so here in Sun City. This is not the case. There are minimum groundcover requirements, but these can include drought tolerant native species of plants that have habitat value. And you are allowed to let your grass go brown and dormant over the summer. Maintaining a grass lawn is probably the worst thing you can do if you want wildlife to visit your yard. A mono culture of a non-native grass species along with the concomitant pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers all do much more harm than good. One of the key, eye-opening concepts that is gaining more widespread acceptance is that in fact, the dead leaves, catkins, acorns, and twigs that fall off our oaks are as important as the trees themselves in sustaining healthy trees and all the wildlife they support. Those caterpillars and other creatures that depend on the oak trees frequently spend a significant portion of the year attached to or nestling among those leaves and shed tree products. As the material decomposes, it releases exactly the nutrients it took in and creates exactly the conditions necessary to sustain the trees as well as the creatures that live in the soil, wander along the surface or fly within the canopy. When we rake or remove our leaves, we break the cycle that evolved over millions of years. Mulch-mowing the

leaves rather than removing them offers a little improvement but destroys most of the creatures hiding in them. Raking them into our beds would be great if we (or at least I) didn't get cited for having visible leaves in our garden beds: however, if your beds are well planted with native perennials, shrubs and trees, the leaves will not be visible and/ or will decompose quickly. Of course, all of these greens are naturally destined to make excellent mulch, and it is too bad that we are not allowed to simply leave them in place for this purpose (I have been cited several times by the CA for attempting to do so) but instead, at least for the time being, we need to purchase imported material with similar but less than ideal composition, bagged in plastic. If you spread this in a thin layer over your leaves it hinders the process a bit but it is better than removing the leaves altogether.

If you are using native plants and natural mulch you never need to add fertilizer to your yard, and in fact fertilizer often makes things worse. The excess nitrogen in many fertilizers actually promotes weed growth and attracts insect pests to your yard. Native plants get all they need from rain and decomposing plant and natural animal waste material. Of course, if you compost your kitchen waste in a home composter (which now is allowed in Sun City) the resulting product will benefit your plants even more!

More information on these and related topics can be found at my website, martinbyhower.com. Much of the information in this article was inspired by or extracted from an excellent new book, "Nature's Best Hope" by Douglas Tallamy.

By: Martin Byhower

