



The Sabal

March 2018

Volume 35, number 3

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

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NPP meeting topic/speaker:

"Frontier Naturalist: Berlandier in South Texas"

—by Javier de León

Tues., March 27th, at 7:30pm

Biologist/naturalist Javier de León is Park Superintendent at Estero Llano Grande State Park in Weslaco. Javier will cover the general exploration in South Texas and Northeast Mexico by the Spanish and then Mexico, focusing on the work of Jean-Louis Berlandier while he lived in Matamoros.

Berlandier's travels will be examined as well as his botanical and other data collection. Javier's interests include native plants, butterflies, birds, dragonflies, reptiles and how to get Valley residents to also admire these critters. Please join us.

The meeting is at:

Valley Nature Center,

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



Above: Tropical Parula in Berlandier's Fiddlewood, *Citharexylum berlandieri*, PDST 412, at SPI Nature & Birding Center. Fiddlewood has been much-used for berries, nectar and insects over winter and spring. Javi Gonzalez photo.

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.

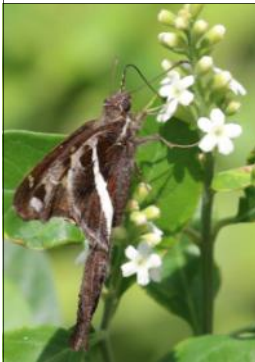
Change of address, missing issue, or membership: <bwessling@rgv.rr.com>

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Call for Articles!

Please submit articles for consideration. Bloom reports from various parts of the valley, what the animals are finding to eat on native plants, and which plants are in fruit in your area are all good topics for inclusion in The Sabal. Thanks for any information you can provide to enhance our content about native plants and their role in the environment. Email to: <mild.christina@gmail.com>. Thanks!

Native Nectar Plants in Deep South Texas Spring— Here are some Facebook shots posted recently.



Berlandier's Fiddlewood shrub, Citharexylum berlandieri, PDST 412. White-Striped Longtail. Dan Jones photo.

Anacua tree, Ehretia anacua, PDST 143. Frequent blooms. Sweet edible drupes adored by birds. Heavy shade. Hackberry Emperor. Mike A Rickard photo.

Texas Mountain Laurel, Mescal Bean Tree/Shrub. Sophora secundiflora, PDST 270. Fragrant blooms smell like grape juice. Leaves and seeds are toxic. Seed extracts were used by Amerindians medicinally and for ceremonial use. Pipevine Swallowtail and Gray Hairstreak. Photos by Juan Sebastian.



White Plumbago, Plumbago scandens, PDST 352. Long-blooming, sprawling, colony-forming. Seed-pods very sticky, irritating. Olive Clouded Skipper. Ginny Rickard photo.

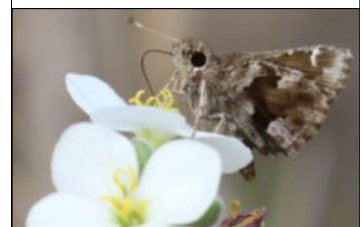
Spring Mistflower, Tamoulipa azurea, PDST 127. Several mistflower species have been blooming. This species is pleasingly aromatic. An especially valuable spring nectar plant not found outside the LRGV in Texas. Hammock Skipper. Mike A Rickard photo.

Low Croton, Croton humilis, continued to provide valuable nectar from winter into early spring. PDST 217. Crimson Patch. Mike A Rickard photo.



Winged Sea Purslane, Sesuvium verrucosum. Widespread succulent, salt-tolerant, frequent blooming. Dainty Sulphur. Photo by Rick Snider.

Nerisyrenia camporum or Synthlipsis greggii, PDST 153, 158. Low growing wildflower. Nyssa Roadside Skipper. Dan Jones photo.



Trees & Shrubs As Caterpillar Food Plants— by Christina Mild
 Plant photos by Dr. Alfred Richardson. Butterfly photos by Berry Nall.

Some years back, NPP produced “Butterfly Gardening,” a handbook featuring native host and nectar plants for butterflies. This article might be considered an addendum to that handbook. (See also Berry Nall’s website: [http://leps.thenalls.net])

Blooming trees and shrubs seem to burst forth even when spring rainfall is so low that wildflowers are much reduced in size and number. Driving past any brushy area, one glimpses Blackbrush, for example, where it blends into other brush when not in bloom. Much of our thorny brush serves as caterpillar food, hopefully increasing the value of that thorny stuff in the eyes of our readers. There is pollen in those blooms, providing sustenance for the pollinating bees essential to agriculture. Thorny brush is, of course, critical to the nesting success of birds, providing protection from predators. Perhaps we can rethink a line of thorny brush along a fenceline, regardless of the jabs we’re bound to endure in maintaining a bit of order around us.

Right: Black-Throated Green Warbler on Huisache, *Acacia farnesiana*, PDST 240. Huisache is often photographed by birders, as many warblers visit to pick off insects. You can sometimes hear chewing insects below a Huisache. Ernest Herrera photo, taken at McAllen Nature Center.



Ceraunus Blue, *Hemiargus ceraunus*, nectaring on mallow.

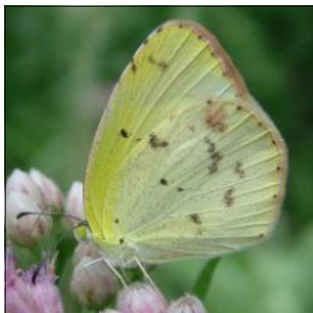


also uses Huisache.

Mimosa Yellow, *Pyrisitia nise*.



Little Yellow, *Pyrisitia lisa*, nectaring on *Pluchea odorata*.



For each plant featured in this article, butterfly photos illustrate species documented by Berry Nall to successfully reproduce using the specific host plant.

Depressed Wand-Like Bundle Flower, *Desmanthus virgatus* var. *depressus*, PDST 244.

Usually occurs in disturbed places, such as lawns and roadsides. A seed blend of 4 closely-related species, “Bee Wise Bundle Flower,” is used on ranches to provide cover and food for wildlife, to improve soil quality, and is sometimes sown in agricultural fields.

This small shrub might be more valuable than we generally think.



Trees & Shrubs As Caterpillar Food Plants, continued...

Ceraunus Blue, *Hemiargus ceraunus*,
(see also previous page)



Also uses:
Texas Ebony.

Coyote Cloudywing, *Achalarus toxeus*,
nectaring on Guayacan.



Large Orange Sulphur, *Phoebis agarithe*,
nectaring on Texas Kidneywood.



Mimosa Yellow,
(p 3) also
uses Blackbrush.

Reakirt's Blue, *Echinargus isola*,
nectaring on Frogfruit.



Also uses:
Mesquite

Blackbrush, Chaparro Prieto, *Acacia rigidula*, PDST 241.
(*Vachellia rigidula*)

Spring-blooming. Shrub or tree, up to 10' tall. Widespread, probably the most common shrub in Starr County. Component of Arroyo Colorado brush (just one of the western species found in that ecosystem). Commonly found on shallow ridges. Produces many creamy caterpillar-like blooms from February to April. Insects and white-tailed deer forage the stems along with birds and small mammals. Small mammals and birds inhabit this plant for protection.

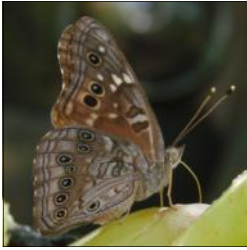
Useful in rock gardens, landscapes and xeriscapes.

At Ramsey Park, our most successful garden of small, transplanted cacti grow beneath a large blackbrush specimen which has become a rather splendid tree.



Trees & Shrubs As Caterpillar Food Plants, continued...

Empress Leilia, *Asterocampa leilia*.



Hackberry Emperor, *Asterocampa celtis*.



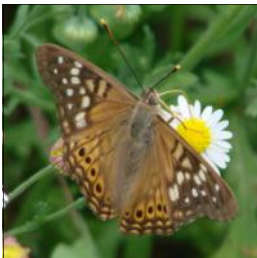
also uses
Sugar Hackberry.

American Snout, *Libytheana carinenta*,
nectaring on a legume.



also uses
Sugar Hackberry

Tawny Emperor, *Asterocampa clyton*,
nectaring on an aster.



Question Mark, *Polygonia interrogationis*.



also uses
False Nettle.

Spiny Hackberry, Granjeno, *Celtis pallida*, PDST 408.

Leaves are a bit of a challenge to identify, as they assume various shapes and degrees of notching. Zigzag branches and abundant thorns are clues to an I.D. Forms arches among other trees and brush.

This is the most easily-grown shrub in Ramsey Park and Harlingen yards. The fruit is tasty, like pumpkin or melon, and seems to appear after any significant rain. Birds spread the shrub everywhere they perch. Provides food and shelter for small mammals, deer, birds and insects.

Photo from the web: Southwest Desert Flora.

Note: the genus Celtis is moving to Cannabaceae Family.



Sugar Hackberry, Palo Blanco, *Celtis laevigata*, PDST 408.

This winter-deciduous large tree is fast-growing, beautiful, notoriously short-lived, and should be grown well away from structures to avoid damage from a fallen tree. Birds such as parrots consume growing leaf and flower buds in spring and fruits in fall. A thin layer of tasty fruit, encased in a hard brown-red shell, is eaten by many animals. Tastes a bit like a date.

Highly-important to wildlife, this thornless tree provides food, shelter and nesting sites for many species.

Palo Blanco often occurs in areas where seasonal rains bring temporary flooding and water flow.

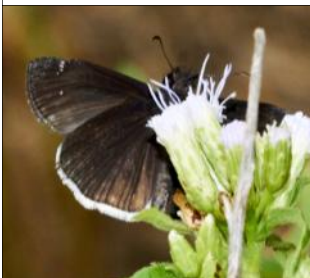


Right: Photo by Donna Shear-mire McCown. Donna can count on Green Parakeets to visit her Sugar Hackberry in the fall. This one seems to have a beak full of fruit.

Trees & Shrubs As Caterpillar Food Plants, continued...

Drummond's Rattlebush, *Sesbania drummondii*, PDST 268.

Usually found near water. Pods make a rattling sound in the wind. Not often cultivated. Perennial, dying back to the base in cold weather. Seeds are poisonous. Livestock deaths have been reported, but the foul taste is usually avoided by grazers.



Funereal Duskywing, *Drynnis funeralis*.

Also uses Barbados Cherry and Bequilla, *Sesbania herbacea*.

Small Flowered Wrightwort, *Carlowrightia parviflora*, PDST 48.

This *Carlowrightia* species is an excellent colony-former, a short (20") thornless shrub with delicate stems and flowers. Unlike some colony-forming species, it doesn't impede the growth of other plant diversity. It's resistant to the unfortunate trimming of overzealous gardeners, as it will re-sprout rather easily from an established root system. Once roots are well-established, it's difficult to pull out, another plus when an uninitiated gardener appears on the scene. Blooming occurs almost year-round. An excellent replacement for invasive grasses, once they are removed. Most yards have space for this small plant.



Right: Sachem nectaring on *Carlowrightia*, photo by Dan Jones.

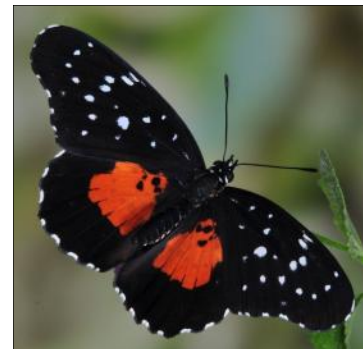
Several butterflies use this small jewel as hostplant:



Elada Checkerspot (mating), *Texola elada*.
also uses *Carlowrightia texana*.



Banded Patch, *Chlosyne endeis*.



Crimson Patch, *Chlosyne janais*.

NPP's Butterfly Gardening Handbook is available online and in print.

LRGV Native Plant Sources

See also our
Sponsors on right

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

Marianna Trevino Wright, Exec.Dir.

cell 956-648-7117

<mariana@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

Sponsors (Native Plant Nurseries)

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301 S. Border Ave.

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Above: Pipevine Swallowtail, *Battus philenor*, nectaring on *Croton ciliatoglandulifer*, Mexican Croton, PDST 215.

Glandular stalks along the leaf edges are unique to this croton species. It has been used medicinally in Mexico. The glandular secretions can be irritating to eyes and skin. Growth to 39" tall. Willacy and Starr counties. More common in Mexico.

Several croton species have appeared repeatedly on Facebook Butterfly pages throughout this recent winter. They provide good butterfly nectar, are host plants and are well-worth cultivating in yards. Photo by Dan Jones.

**NPP Board & General Meetings are held at
Valley Nature Center**

(4th Tues. each month, except thru summer)

Brd Mtgs 6:30pm — Speaker 7:30pm

2018 meeting dates: 4/24, 5/22

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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*Please mail this form with dues check payable to:
Native Plant Project, POB 2742, San Juan, TX 78589-7742*

TO:

NPP meeting/speaker:

The Native Plant Project will present:

**“Frontier Naturalist:
Berlandier in South Texas”**
—by Javier de León

Tues., March 27th, at 7:30pm

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

We hope to see you there!

**Bring blooming
things
to show off
or for identification!!**



Below: Pavon Emperor nectaring on Guajillo, *Acacia berlandieri*. PDST 239. Hidalgo and Starr counties. Does well in cultivation. One of our earliest spring-blooming trees/shrubs. Usual height is 10' tall. Honey from this source has excellent flavor. Photo by Mike A Rickard.



In this issue:

**Native Nectar Plants in Deep South Texas Spring,
Trees & Shrubs As Caterpillar Food Plants.**