



The Sabal

March 2023
Volume 39, number 3

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Plant species page #s in the Sabal refer to:
“**Plants of Deep South Texas**” by A.Richardson & K.King (PDST).

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NPP meeting topic/speaker: **Tues., March 28th , at 7:30pm**

“Conservation Programs at San Antonio Botanical Garden”
presented by — Michael Eason

Our speaker, Michael Eason, is head of the San Antonio Botanical Garden's Rare Plant Conservation Department. He is also conservation botanist for Texas Flora, a botanical consulting company. Eason has previously worked with the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and Millennium Seed Bank Project. He is the author of "Wildflowers of Texas" published in 2018. Eason volunteers his time for organizations like the Wildflower Center, Native Plant Society of Texas, and Nature Conservancy.

For his presentation, Eason will be speaking on the various conservation programs at San Antonio Botanical Gardens, with a few highlights on oaks, aquatic species and other rare native plants of Texas.

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



Photos by Cat Traylor, Ceeyal Ranch. *Echinocereus poselgeri*, Sacasil, Pencil Cactus, PDST 165. Found infrequently but throughout deep south Texas. Grows from a tuberous root. Stems may grow to 57” long.

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>

Blooms Quiz. Close-up Photos by Roberto Gaitan.

Can you identify the species on pages 2-3?



Counter-clockwise from bottom left:

Tiny Tim, *Thymophylla pentachaeta* and *T. tenuiloba*, PDST 131, are both found in deep south Texas. They are distinguished by having opposite (*pentachaeta*) or alternate (*tenuiloba*) leaves. It's pretty hard to look at such tiny plants so closely and even harder to take a photo which shows the tiny leaves in such detail.

Straggler Daisy, Prostrate Lawn Weed, *Calyptocarpus vialis*, PDST 90. Common volunteer in lawns, often occurring between sidewalk cracks and in disturbed places. Good nectar plant.

Palo Verde, *Parkinsonia texana*, PDST 235. Blooms occur in spring and summer. Branches (palo) are green (verde) on this compact tree, growing to 13'. Variety *macra* and *texana* both occur in deep south Texas.

Pearl Net Leaf Milkweed Vine, *Matelea reticulata*, PDST 80. This beautiful bloom produces an elongated, knobby seedpod which splits to release seeds with long white hairs. A well-behaved vine which arches onto low-growing shrubs.

Southern Pepperweed, *Lepidium austrinum*, PDST 153. Generally considered to be a weed, short herb is actually edible. Clusters of tiny 4-petal flowers occur at the tips of each branch.

Ball Moss, *Tillandsia recurvata*, PDST 28-29. Not a moss or a parasite. This plant attaches to a tree for support, photosynthesizes, and receives moisture and nutrients from the air.

Guayacan, *Guaiacum angustifolium*, PDST 425. A woody plant with tiny leaves resembling those of evergreens. Heavily browsed by deer. Host plant for the Lyside Sulphur butterfly, often seen nearby.





Counter-clockwise from bottom left:

Potato tree, *Solanum elaeagnifolium*, PDST 401. Blooms spring thru fall. Very smelly leaves are eaten by chachalaca. Fruit eaten by many birds.

Zizotes, Prairie Milkweed, *Asclepias oenotheroides*, PDST 75. Herbaceous, up to 18" tall. Host to Queen butterflies. Often found in poor soil such as compacted roadsides. Deeply rooted and hard to transplant.

Berlandier's Fiddlewood, *Citharexylum berlandieri*, PDST 412. Blooms and fruits when moisture is available, often several times each year. In Texas, found only in LRGV. Common on clay dunes near the coast.

Scorpion Tail, *Heliotropium angiospermum*, PDST 144. Excellent butterfly nectar. Blooms may occur throughout the year. Short and herbaceous, found throughout the LRGV.

Frogfruit, *Phyla* sp. PDST 418-19. Herbaceous groundcover. Host for the Phaon Crescent butterfly. Excellent nectar. *Phyla* species are distinguished by leaf morphology.

Spring Mistflower, White-blooming form, *Tamulipa azurea*, PDST 127. Leaves are delta-shaped, not stinky like Crucita, *Chromolaena odorata*. Typically begin to bloom in spring, often continue thru fall. Blooms have sweet scent. Excellent butterfly nectar.



Christina Mild
RIO DELTA WILD

(Below: Lotebush fruit and sharply-pointed thorn.)

FLORA FACTS

Scientific Name: *Ziziphus obtusifolia*

Common Names: Lotebush, Clepe

Family: Rhamnaceae

PDST p 366.

Gumdrop-Laden Foliage Conceals Thorns

The dark fruit of Clepe feeds many birds during south Texas' April. During the fruit-laden season, gumdrop tree is an appropriate name. Shriveled fruit may indicate removal of sweet stuff by butterflies such as the Mexican Bluewing, which uses plant sap rather than nectar from blooms.

The scientific name for this plant may be easy to remember. It has a nice sound and bears meaning. *Ziziphus obtusifolia* is that name. *Ziziphus* has a nice sound. *Obtusifolia* is descriptive of the leaves. Obtuse: dull, not sharp, blunted. Clepe has prominent thorn-tipped branches. After rains, lustrous foliage conceals the thorns.

The shiny leaves soon bear evidence of insect-foraging. Bite marks appear. Entire leaves disappear.

Excellent photographs of *Ziziphus obtusifolia* are found in "A Field Guide to Common South Texas Shrubs," R, Taylor, J. Rutledge and J. Herrera, 1997. This book is an excellent help in learning native shrubs. Due to their short stature, many of our trees are included also.

Taylor et. al. summarize wildlife use of clepe: white-tailed deer occasionally browse the leaves, as do cattle, sheep and goats. The fruit is eaten by chachalaca, gray fox, raccoon, coyote, (and Christina Mild). The thorny bush gives cover and protection for quail. Even the picky cactus wren will sometimes nest in a lotebush.

One looks hard for distinctions to identify "near-desert" plants. Clepe has distinctive thorns. Each branch tip narrows to a hardened thorn-tip. Striations adorn the green bark in shades of grey and blue-green.

Stark angles of the barren thorny branches are strikingly beautiful against the sky and in contrast with surrounding foliage. One who learns to identify clepe by barren thorniness is often confused by the leafiness which follows rain.

Lotebush is a seldom-abundant but common component of shrub communities and occurs in a variety of soil types and mixed-brush communities.

It is an appropriate plant choice for revegetation and landscaping throughout the valley, especially in dry places.

Right: Abundant glossy leaves appear on Lotebush following rain. Striations on green stems help to identify the plant.

—continued on page 5



Right: Blooms of Lotebush are typical of the family Rhamnaceae. Photo is approximately life-size.

Amargoza and knife-leaf condalia are often confused with clepe because all have similar woody thorn-tips. Neither bears the bark striations of clepe. Both have tiny leaves much like short evergreen needles. They retain them even through drought, while those of clepe are generally eaten bare.

The gumdrops of clepe are round, blue-black and sweet, with one large seed. The fruit is similar in shape and color to coyotillo fruit, which causes paralysis. Coyotillo (see photo below left) and clepe grow happily intertwined: good reason to remain alert while sampling.

On a Good Friday (many years past), clepe was laden with gumdrops in Harlingen's Arroyo Park. A walk along the playing fields and paved trails revealed a nice diversity of arroyo brush. Several kinds of cacti grew beneath and shaded by the shrubs and trees, although invasive Kalanchoes threatened diversity. There is usually ample food for wildlife and concrete benches for people who may care to sit.



Left: Coyotillo leaves have definite parallel venation. The plant is thornless, unlike much of the Arroyo brush vegetation. (Compare leaves with those of Lotebush (clepe) above.)

All parts of Coyotillo are poisonous, not to touch as poison ivy, but poisonous if consumed. Coyotes and chachalaca eat the leaves and fruits without ill effects: not true of humans.

More about Coyotillo: PDST p 366. Coyotillo is *Karwinskia humboldtiana*. Family Rhamnaceae.

Two Tiny Plants, Perhaps Easily Confused.

Smartweed Leafflower *Phyllanthus polygonoides*,

Family Phyllanthaceae, formerly Euphorbiaceae. PDST p 227.

Photos by Cat Traylor, CEEYAL Ranch, San Isidro, Starr County, TX, Feb. 4, 2022. Immature fruiting structures hang below each thin stem. Note the small leaves appressed to the stem. Perennial, usually prostrate growing herbs. Male and female flowers usually on the same plant, greenish and inconspicuous.



Photo left from iNaturalist:

Nodding Green Violet, *Hybanthus verticillatus*,
(now *Pombalia verticillata*) Family Violaceae, PDST 422.

Low-growing herb. Flowers nodding downward. Leaves up to 1.5” long. Widespread in Texas, especially in disturbed areas.

It is a host for the Variegated Fritillary butterfly.

There are two additional natives known to host the Variegated Fritillary. They are also quite small:

Damiana, *Turnera diffusa*, PDST 407.

Flax, *Linum* species PDST 293-4.

It would be a mistake to overlook the tiniest plants in our midst. We have yet to discover all the creatures which rely upon them.



Variegated Fritillary,
Euptoieta claudia

Photos by Berry Nall,
[leps.thenalls.net]

Left: Mature adult butterfly.

Right: Chrysalis, with butterfly ready to emerge. Isn't it gorgeous?!



Sponsors (Native Plant Nurseries)

LRGV Native Plant Sources

Heep's LRGV Native Plant Nursery

Owned and operated by Mike and Claire Heep
We grow plants suited to landscaping
and revegetation in south Texas.
1714 S. Palm Court Drive, Harlingen, TX 78552
(956) 457-6834 <heep0311@yahoo.com>
[\[www.heepsnursery.com\]](http://www.heepsnursery.com)



Below: White-Striped Longtail butterfly photographed on *Lantana velutina* by Dan and Honeylet Jones.



Below: Julia Heliconian butterfly photographed on *Lantana velutina* by Donna Shearmire McCown, at Ramsey Park, Harlingen.

Perez Ranch Nursery
(Betty Perez)

12 miles north of La Joya, TX
(956) 587-2149
<PerezRanchNatives@gmail.com>



These vendors may also sell exotics:

National Butterfly Center
Old Military Hwy/3333 Butterfly Pk Dr
Mission, TX 78572
[<http://www.nationalbutterflycenter.org>]

Rancho Lomitas Nursery
(Benito Trevino)
P.O. Box 442
Rio Grande City, TX 78582
(956) 486-2576 *By appt. only

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
956-874-4267, 956-316-2599



Right: Red-bordered Metalmark butterfly, *Caria ino*, nectaring on Turkey Tangle Frogfruit, *Phyla nodiflora*. Photo by Heather Wise. Unknown insect.



NPP Board & General Meetings are held at Valley Nature Center
(4th Tues. each month, except thru summer)

Brd Mtgs 6:30pm — Speaker 7:30pm
Upcoming meetings: April 25, May 23

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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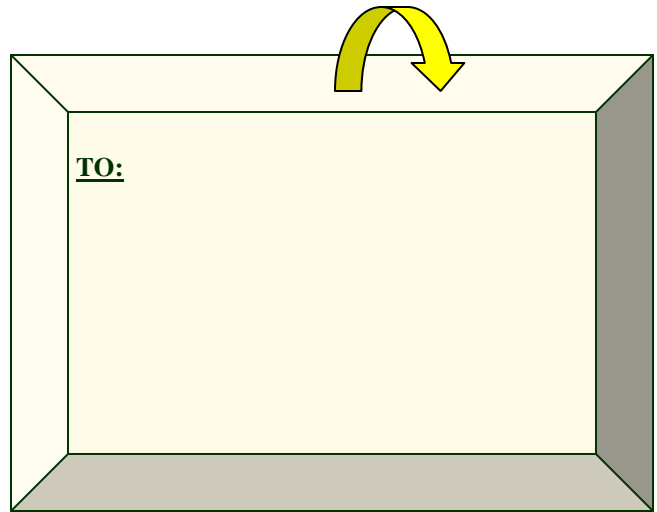
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Above: Mexican Bluewing egg-laying on *Adelia vaseyii*, a documented hostplant. Photo by Mike A Rickard.

NPP meeting/speaker:

The Native Plant Project will present:

“Conservation Programs at San Antonio Botanical Garden”

by Michael Eason

Tues., March 28th, 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!

Feel free to bring a native plant for I.D.
Native Plants are available for a donation.
Great opportunity to love another native plant!

Plant Species in this issue: *Adelia vaseyii*, *Asclepias oenotheroides*, *Calyptocarpus vialis*, *Cephalanthus occidentalis*, *Chromolaena odorata*, *Citharexylum berlandieri*, *Echinocereus poselgeri*, *Guaiacum angustifolium*, *Heliotropium angiospermum*, *Hybanthus verticillatus*, *Karwinskia humboldtiana*, *Lantana velutina*, *Lepidium austrinum*, *Linum species*, *Matelea reticulata*, *Parkinsonia texana*, *Phyla sp.*, *Phyla nodiflora*, *Solanum erianthum*, *Tamaulipa azurea*, *Thymophylla sp.*, *Tillandsia recurvata*, *Turnera diffusa*, *Ziziphus obtusifolia*.