



The Sabal

April 2014

Volume 31, number 4

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April 2014 Mtg., Native Plant Project:

Tues., April 22nd, 2014: at 7:30pm

The Native Plant Project will present:

“Hiding in Plain Sight -
How Host Plants Protect Caterpillars”
by **Berry Nall.**

Berry is from Falcon Heights, where he is a science teacher and pastor of the Baptist church. He has been raising caterpillars and butterflies as a hobby for years. He spends much of his free time roaming the RGV, photographing butterflies and searching native plants looking to identify the caterpillars that feed on them. After seeing this program, we will all be better at spotting the elusive caterpillar.

The meeting is held at:

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



ABOVE: Pipevine Swallowtail larva observed on NPP Fieldtrip March 30th on frontage of La Prieta ranch north of Raymondville. This larva has moved away from the host plant, which helps to elude predators.

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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“April in Deep South Texas”

- by Christina Mild

Landscaping: TX Tourist Information Center

March 30th was almost April. NPP participants enjoyed a fieldtrip to the frontage of La Prieta ranch a bit north of Raymondville.

Many of the participants met at the Texas Tourist Information Center in Harlingen to carpool and caravan to the study area. I was personally delighted to view the many native and adaptive species planted at the center. It was especially pleasing to see that plants were appropriately pruned and otherwise well-tended.

(The end of March is an especially good time to trim native species back and water them well to allow for luxuriant spring growth.)

On the right are three of the native species which were trimmed back recently and showing excellent new spring growth.

A very pleasant surprise was the use of mass plantings of Heliotrope as specimen plants. These should attract upwards of 25 different butterfly species in search of nectar.



ABOVE: *Heliotropium angiospermum*, Scorpion's Tail. PDST 144. With sufficient moisture, this wonderful butterfly nectar plant will bloom almost year-round. Mulch background is attractive.

BELOW: Hairy Wedelia, PDST 135. Blooms spring through fall. Good butterfly host and nectar plant.



BELOW: Gregg's Mistflower, from west Texas, grows as a short, bushy, spreading perennial. Excellent butterfly nectar. Easily grown in this area.



BELOW: *Lantana urticoides*, PDST 416. Blooms from spring through fall (and even sometimes during winter) throughout the LRGV. Butterflies nectar here and birds consume the resultant fruits. Toxic to livestock.





Finding the Elusive Rattlesnake Weed, *Daucus pusillus*, PDST 69

The above composite of photos was found at the following website:

[<http://w3.biosci.utexas.edu/prc/HaysFlora/pages/DAPU3.html>]

Photo by Bob Harms <harms@austin.utexas.edu>

Apiaceae – Carrot family, Umbelliferae

On our next fieldtrip, we should probably bring a magnifying loupe! There was lots of speculation about what might or might not be Rattlesnake Weed. Without a very close look at a blooming specimen of the plant, it's rather difficult to see all the barbed spines which eventually help this plant to move from place to place as prickly seeds.

It's also difficult for book publishers to include enough photos to assist the botanizer in seeing various attributes of the many parts of a plant throughout a lifespan and equally hard to predict how any given plant's attributes might change with age.

Perhaps one attribute we can seek in future quests for Rattlesnake Weed is the spiny nature of the plant's stem, visible on the right in a photo taken and identified by Dr. Al Richardson. The bottom photo was also taken by Dr. Richardson of mature seeds "exploding" from a Rattlesnake Weed umbel (the umbrella-like bloom).

(In retrospect, I was probably wrong in identifying many umbelliferous blooms as Bishop's Weed! Christina Mild)



Fieldtrip Notes Continued....

The fieldtrip to view wildflowers along the frontage of La Prieta Ranch north of Raymondville has been an annual event organized by various entities over almost 20 years. During drought years, 2013 for example, the trip was cancelled. In comparison to what I've viewed in the past, conditions were different this year in many ways. For several reasons, I believe that the area had been mown sometime in the month previous. One of the most definite indicators was the short stature of the usually-large shrub *Lantana urticoides* (*L. horrida*) amongst the wildflowers. In addition, Square-Bud Daisy specimens were quite short. Those I found were less than 12" in height. This made it fairly easy, for the first time in my experience, to keep the entire plant in focus in one photographic frame.



ABOVE: *Tetragonatheca repanda*, PDST 128. Note the buds (enclosed in an orange oval) which lend "Square-Bud" to this daisy's name. The usual blooming height of this plant is closer to 16". These plants are perennials. The yellow petals of these daisies have a unique color tone amongst the yellow wildflowers. Although many species were present for the fieldtrip, growth was not as dense as I have previously experienced. This allowed photographing entire plants with few "distractions" of leaves, blooms, etc. from other species.



ABOVE: *Tradescantia subacaulis*, Stemless Spiderwort PDST 31, might be called "Spiderwort on Steroids." This succulent perennial is endemic to the sandy soils of Texas in Hidalgo and Willacy counties. (This species is larger than shown in the photo.) The only plant I had previously thought of as *Tradescantia* (*micrantha*), often called Spiderwort, has now been renamed *Callisia* (PDST 29), even though it has the 3 petals of a *Tradescantia*.



Above: Mike Heep identifies this as Red Lovegrass, *Eragrostis secundiflora*, previously named *Eragrostis oxylepis*. It's a lovely bunchgrass, about 12" high.

Fieldtrip Notes Continued....

Growing in the sandy areas which had been mown low to create a firebreak for La Prieta Ranch were several interesting wildflower species.

On the right is *Zornia reticulata*, Net Leaf Rabbit's Ears, PDST 273. The paired and pointed, hairy leaflets are a defining characteristic. Blooms are up to 1/2" long. The habit is prostrate or sprawling and sandy soils are preferred. Blooming occurs in spring and in fall.



Field Bindweed (left) is an introduced species from Eurasia, now occurring in Hidalgo and Starr counties. It is one of the Convolvulaceae (Morning Glory), *Convolvulus arvensis*, PDST 188.

Convolvulus means "to twine around."

By the time we were gearing up to find a lunch spot, Lazy Daisy was opening up: photo on right.

We have both Kidder's and Coastal Lazy Daisy locally, but distinguishing them takes some doing. See PDST 86-87.

In any case, this pretty white Asteraceae is one of the varieties of *Aphanostephus skirrhobasis*. Try saying that fast a couple of times!





Delicate blue wildflowers: Some of the most wondrous wildflowers of our sandy areas are delicate blue blossoms on tall, narrow stems.

On the left is a Scrophulariaceae with the uninspiring name of Texas Toad Flax (PDST 388). A distinguishing feature is the basal spur (see arrow) seen brilliantly in this photo taken by Dr. Al Richardson.

Just below is *Lobelia berlandieri*, somewhat magnified, PDST 173, with two upper petals pointing upwards like ears or perhaps horns. Campanulaceae family.



On the right is another in the same family, Small Venus' Looking Glass, PDST 174. This delicate plant has five equal petals and clasping leaves. Two plants are shown, growing in close proximity.

We found beautiful specimens of each on the March 30th fieldtrip.



At Estero Llano Grande State Park, Hannah Buschert, CIG, has been seeing Buttercup, Dakota Vervain, Pink Mint, and Golden Prickly Poppy (Hannah's photo is on the right). At Bentsen SP, she's been seeing Straggler Daisies and Yellow Prickly Poppies. Golden Prickly Poppies sometimes develop orange-tinged petals. Photo below left was taken June 29, 2002. See PDST 344 to discover the difference between Yellow and Golden Prickly Poppy.



LRGV Native Plant Sources

Heep's Nursery (& Landscaping)

(Mike Heep)
1714 S. Palm Court Drive
Harlingen, TX 78552
(956) 457-6834

Valley Nature Center

301 S. Border Ave.
Weslaco, TX 78596
(956) 969-2475
<info@valleynaturecenter.org>
[www.valleynaturecenter.org]

Perez Ranch Nursery

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

Mother Nature's Creations

(Billy & Sue Snider)
2822 Nueces; Harlingen, TX 78550
Nursery open by appointment:
(956) 428-4897

NABA Butterfly Park
Old Military Hwy & Butterfly Pk Dr
Mission, TX 78552
(956) 583-9009

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

Landscaper using Natives:

Williams Wildscapes, Inc.
(Allen Williams)
750 W Sam Houston
Pharr, TX 78577
(956) 460-9864
[www.williamswildscapes.com]

Sponsors

Heep's LRGV Native Plant Nursery

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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.**

**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. (Photo above: Ebony blooms.)



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

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TO:

NPP March meeting/speaker on:

Tues., April 22nd, 2014: at 7:30pm

The Native Plant Project will present:

Hiding in Plain Sight -
How Host Plants Protect Caterpillars"
by **Berry Nall.**

at:

**Valley Nature Center,
301 S. Border, (in Gibson Park)
Weslaco. 956-969-2475**

Photo right: (Taken on Mar 30th NPP fieldtrip.) Pink to purple blooming Rio Grande Phlox, PDST 352, blooms from spring through summer. Delicate blue/purple *Lobelia berlandieri*, PDST 173, blooms in spring. It can be toxic to livestock. Both prefer sandy soils. *Although Phlox naturally occurs here, it is also sometimes sown by the Highway Dept.*



This month's SABAL topic: "April in Deep South Texas"